


# GREAT MASTERS IN PAINTING & SCULPTURE

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**The Great Masters  
in Painting and Sculpture  
Edited by G. C. Williamson**

**ANDREA MANTEGNA**



## GREAT MASTERS IN PAINTING AND SCULPTURE

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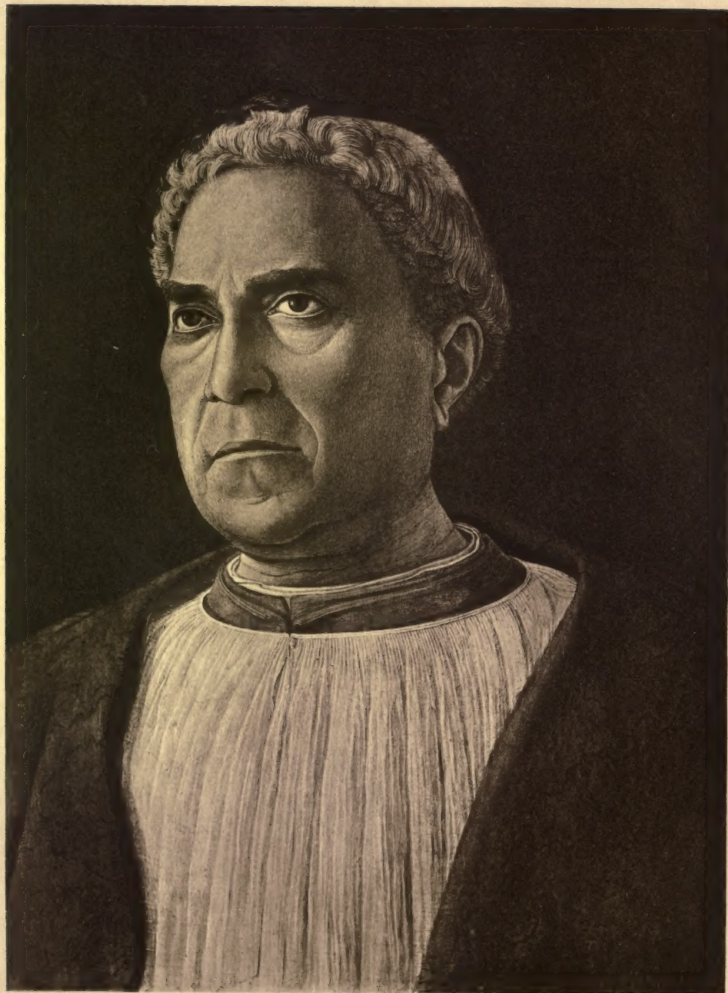
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*Knapelstangh, photo.*

*Portrait of Cardinal Scarampi.  
by Mantegna.*

*Berlin Gallery.*

# ANDREA MANTEGNA

By MAUD CRUTTWELL

Author of "LUCA SIGNORELLI," Etc.



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LONDON

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## PREFACE

IT is with much diffidence that I have undertaken a work which deals with a Genius so great as Mantegna, a work which I am fully conscious should be attempted only by one far better equipped than myself to comprehend the grandeur of the movement of which he was representative.

I regret that the small dimensions of the present series do not allow of an appendix, containing the many documents discovered by the efforts of M. Armand Baschet and the Conte Carlo d'Arco, but to print even the most important only would enlarge the volume too considerably.

I wish to express my deep sense of gratitude to Mr Bernhard Berenson for the generous aid he has invariably given. To his personal counsel and to his published works—particularly "The Florentine" and "The Central Italian Painters of the Renaissance"—I owe most, not only of my understanding, but of my enjoyment of fifteenth century Italian art. To the kindness of Dr Gronau, also, I owe much for several important suggestions.

MAUD CRUTTWELL.

FLORENCE, September 1901.





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*Anaerson photo*]

[*Sant' Andrea, Mantua*

BRONZE BUST OF MANTEGNA,

# ANDREA MANTEGNA

## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

IN the church of S. Andrea, in the lake-girdled city of Mantua, still survives the small chapel which it was Mantegna's pride in his last years to possess. The faded frescoes loom out dimly in the half-light, their statuesque severity recalling the master's own work. At the entrance we come face to face with a fierce mask of bronze (Plate 2), lion-like keeping guard, the mane of hair circled with a crown of bay. It is the portrait of the dead painter, modelled by Sperandio, or as some say, by Gian Marco Cavalli, a worthy monument to his genius. Grimly the stern face confronts us, the eyes seeming to flash out a challenge. In their deeply-drilled balls it is recorded diamonds once blazed. The massive skull shows a magnificent intellectual development, the powerful jaw an imperious and unflinching will. All the fierce energies which made the strength of fifteenth century Italy are concentrated in this grand head, which might serve as a personification of the strenuous spirit of the Renaissance, with its self-devotion, its self-reliance,

and its optimism. This was a man who took life earnestly, ardently, with no doubts of its worth, or of the value of his own labours therein, and with no half-heartedness in the fulfilling of them, fired by the true Renaissance zeal, enthusiastic and devoted.

And among the greatest of the Quattrocentists Mantegna takes his place, not only as the painter who gave expression to their lofty aspirations, but as one of the foremost who urged on and pioneered the great work of Revival, straining every fibre towards the new ideals of life and thought, which were to bring a fresh youth back to the world.



## CHAPTER I

### LIFE IN PADUA

ANDREA MANTEGNA was born in 1431, not, as was formerly supposed, in Padua, but in the neighbouring town of Vicenza.<sup>1</sup> He, however, signs himself "*Patavinus*" up to his latest years, and a Paduan we also feel him essentially to be, indebted to the scholarly atmosphere of that city for the development of those qualities of severity and restraint, that classic purity and distinction, by which his work from beginning to end is characterised.

Of his parentage we know nothing but that his father's name was Biagio—"the honoured Ser Biagio," he is called in a Mantuan document, although Vasari declares him to have been of the humblest extraction, telling us also that Andrea himself spent his childhood, Giotto-like, tending sheep. If that be the case, he could not have been a very efficient guardian, since at the age of ten he was already so far advanced in the art of painting as to be received into the *Fraglia dei Pittori e Coffanari*—the fraternity or guild of Paduan artists.

Into this guild he was received, for some unknown reason, as the son of Francesco Squarcione, an

<sup>1</sup> Proved by a document preserved in the Venice archives, to which we refer again on page 17.

interesting personage, of so much importance in the history of North Italian art, that it is necessary to state the few facts that are known of his life, full of mystery and contradiction as they are.

Born in 1394, Squarcione was the son of a Paduan notary, by name Giovanni, and from his earliest years had devoted himself to collecting or copying every fragment of ancient sculpture on which he could lay his hand. Not content with what the neighbourhood of Padua supplied, he set forth in early youth to travel, and is said to have explored the whole of Italy, and even penetrated into Greece, in his search for the treasures of antiquity. Of these he made a large collection, copying besides the finest architectural remains, and making drawings of inscriptions and every fragment of sculpture, which in his travels he found "approach to excellence."

On his return he settled down in Padua, and his father dying and leaving him sufficient means, he bought a house near the Church of the Santo, arranged there his collections, and began that career which earned for him the title of "The Father of Painting." He opened an establishment for the artistic training of youths by the copying of antique sculpture, accepting at the same time commissions for the execution of all kinds of decorative work, from the painting of elaborate frescoes in great churches, down to designs for intarsia, the planning of maps, embroidering of altar-cloths, and even, it would seem, to plain house-painter's work. He educated no less than 137 pupils, coming from all parts of Italy, and from beyond the Alps, many

of whom in mature life delighted to sign themselves his disciples. But in spite of his artistic fame, it is a curious fact that the only painting which is *incontrovertibly* by him<sup>1</sup> (the *Madonna*, No. 27A of the Berlin Gallery), pleasing as it is, shows not only a lack of experience in drawing, but few of those characteristics we are accustomed to call Squarcionesque—that rigidity and rugged sharpness which resulted from the effort to imitate the salience of sculpture. We are forced to the supposition that Squarcione himself was little more than the principal or *impresario* of the establishment, with strong theories of the value of antique sculpture in art-education, and that he probably employed more efficient and experienced draughtsmen as practical teachers in his school. As an antiquary, and as the head of the new and learned academy, he enjoyed great fame, and we hear that the Emperor Frederick, passing through Padua, himself desired his acquaintance, and that San Bernardino went out of his way to visit him. He died, full of honour, in the year 1474, having attained his eightieth year. This is the outline of his life sketched for us by Scardeone,<sup>2</sup> and modified by a few documents. If tradition be true, we may see his portrait in the portly soldier who guards at the martyrdom of S. Christopher in Mantegna's fresco of the Eremitani.

The aim of the school founded by him seems originally to have been simply the revival of the antique style, just as the poets were imitating the

<sup>1</sup> The Lazzaro altarpiece of the Paduan Gallery, attributed to Squarcione, I cannot myself accept as his work.

<sup>2</sup> Scardeone. "De Antiq. Urb. Patav.," 4to Basilæ, page 370.

classical phraseology, and with no further end. It is probable that, had its disciples studied from antique *painting* instead of sculpture, we should have had none of what grew to be its essential characteristics, qualities which resulted from the effort to imitate on a flat surface the actual projection of sculpture. To this effort we owe all those mannerisms of rigidity and harshness, which in the hands of the minor men became positively repulsive, but to it we owe also the solidity and significance of the work of its great disciples. In reality they are all aiming at that realisation of cubic solidity in third-dimensional space, which is so essential in the art of painting. This was the preoccupation of the Paduan school. The problems of movement, colour, line, or beautiful form did not exist for them. Cold, bitter, rugged, ugly—the minor Squarcionesques often are. They forgot that the aims of painting are not identical with those of sculpture, and they were satisfied if they could give to their figures the effect of solid substance which was before their eyes in the sculptured stone, and trick the eye into the belief of actual existence. In their archæological enthusiasm, moreover, they have so crowded their paintings with a medley of ornament, that the significance gained by their success in rendering solidity is destroyed by the profusion of detail. The stiffness of posture, the crabbed severity of so much of their work, are but failures in reproducing the statuesque repose of their models, the real statues, while the strange crumplings and corrugations of their draperies are disposed with the view of suggesting, as in sculpture, the structure of the limbs beneath.



We must glance at the intellectual atmosphere of the city which produced and fostered a school so individual—archæological rather than artistic—in its aims. Padua ranks with Florence in the ardour with which she threw her whole forces into the humanistic movement, and devoted herself to the revival of the classic ideals, and the reconstruction of the antique civilisations. Like Florence she had received the stimulus of the presence of Petrarch, who came at the close of his life to settle in the neighbouring Arqua, bringing thither his library and collections of antiques, and attracting around him the most brilliant scholars of the day. Her university, receiving students from both sides of the Alps, formed at the beginning of the fifteenth century the centre of intellectual culture, nobles, poets, and philosophers spurring each other on to the work of research and exploration. Her surrounding soil was as rich in fragments of Roman sculpture as were her libraries in codices, and both were of equal importance in throwing light on the civilisation they so ardently desired to resuscitate. In the comparatively peaceful days of her Venetian dependence, she was at leisure to throw her entire energies into her intellectual interests, and the great work of research and revival pressed rapidly on within her walls. “Padova la Dotta” was, in fact, a city of scholars, and her citizens, bred from childhood to a profound reverence for learning and culture, were contented with nothing mediocre. In accordance with these high standards, she had always insisted that her monuments, public and private, should be the best that Italy could produce, and had called to her adornment

the greatest artists of their day. Thus, at the beginning of the fifteenth century, she was already possessed of some of the noblest work of Niccolò Pisano, of Giotto, and of Giotto's followers. Doubtless, the stimulus given to her artistic perceptions earlier, by the presence of these masters, together with her passion for antique carving on gem and stone, prepared her for the development of a local school, which should give expression to her individual ideals, and Squarcione, keenest of antiquaries, in founding an academy which was to inculcate the pre-eminence of ancient art, merely responded to her need for artistic self-expression. Thus was the child Mantegna bred up from his earliest years among men whose admiration for everything antique amounted to a passion, who tolerated no mediocrity, and who—scholars, artists and men of action—were united in the common cause of classic research and revival. In such an atmosphere it is little wonder that his natural tendencies to intellectual culture and refinement should have developed speedily towards that supreme distinction which is the characteristic feature of his art.

Other influences, however, besides that of Græco-Roman sculpture, must have been at work in this academy of Squarcione to save its system from becoming merely imitative, and so abortive. There are too many similarities of style and of detail in the work of Jacopo Bellini and the Squarcionesques to leave room for doubt that he exercised an important personal influence upon them. In his sketch-books, preserved in the British Museum and the Louvre, we find most of those peculiarities we are accustomed to

associate with the Paduan school ; the same structure of rock with innumerable splittings, the swirling lines of path and stream, the cone-like hills crowned with fantastic buildings, the bare tree trunks, together with the pebble-sprinkled foregrounds, and the loving introduction of birds and beasts which Jacopo himself inherited from his master Gentile da Fabriano and from Pisanello; more important still, the unnaturally elongated figures, whose anatomy was certainly not derived from antique sculpture. Now, this category includes so many of the external mannerisms of the school, as to lead us to the inevitable conclusion that Jacopo was in some practical way connected with its teaching ; no hated rival, as Vasari asserts, but more probably Squarcione's trusted colleague. A master of architectural perspective, skilled in the reconstruction of classic buildings, a fine draughtsman, and with a deep feeling for the nobility of antique art, he was well fitted to develop its conscious aims, while his feeling for the beauty of Nature herself, the simplicity and gentleness of his attitude towards all natural objects, doubtless stirred in those who were artists, and not merely archæologists, that naïve tenderness in dealing with landscape and living creatures, which allures and charms us, even in the grimmest of the Squarcionesques, and which is as characteristic of the school as its severe conception of the human form.

No document helps to state with certainty when Jacopo first came to Padua. He left Florence in 1425, in consequence of an unmerited disgrace,<sup>1</sup> and it is probable that he came straight thence, alternating his

<sup>1</sup> Vasari, iii., 149, Note 1.

residence between Padua and Venice, his native city. We know that in 1453 he married his daughter to Mantegna,<sup>1</sup> and that in 1460 he, together with his sons Gentile and Giovanni, had completed the altar-piece in the Gattamelata Chapel in the Santo,<sup>2</sup> but beyond this nothing is authenticated. His influence upon Mantegna in externals of form and composition is, however, so deeply impressed as to leave no room for doubt that Andrea submitted to it at the most impressionable period of boyhood. Over and over again in the analysis of his work we shall find its traces, stronger at first, but noticeable even to the last. As a very important factor in the external artistic training of Mantegna the influence of Jacopo Bellini cannot be ignored.

Another and even stronger influence was at work on his more spiritual development, whether exercised by personal intercourse and counsel, or indirectly through observation, is immaterial. Over a hundred years before, Giotto, in his frescoes of the Arena Chapel, had set before the Paduans a matchless example of the value in painting of realisation, if not of realism, and now, in the middle of the fifteenth century, just when fresh impulse was needed, Florence again sent forth her greatest son to continue the work, and to stimulate in them that desire for scientific accuracy and technical excellence, without which no system can long survive decay. In 1444 Donatello, with a crowd of assistants, arrived in Padua, and began that series of magnificent works

<sup>1</sup> See Document, page 18.

<sup>2</sup> Anon. Mor., page 8.



which runs over the whole gamut of his versatile genius, modelling and casting in bronze figure after figure, before the delighted and astonished gaze of the Paduan scholars and artists. Not less than themselves Donatello knew how to value the antique forms, and, beyond anything ever dreamt by them, he knew how to extract the very essence of the pagan spirit, and to combine with it the truth to Nature and individual character which was the passion of their own day. The superb statue of Gattamelata embodied their stateliest classical ideals; the dead Christ, with its half divine, half human expression of suffering, touched the very soul of Christianity; the *putti*, with their shouts and pipings, seemed to them a triumph of joyous life. As an interpreter of the many-sided spirit of the Renaissance, Donatello stands out unrivalled. The aim of the humanist was the harmonious development of mind, body, and character, and surely never has artist expressed the spiritual tendencies of his epoch with quicker perception of their significance than he. The antique delight in external life and bodily vigour, so attractive to minds just emerged from mediæval asceticism, combined with the psychological thoughtfulness and the scientific spirit of his own day, were blended and welded by the great Florentine with a creative power and a perfection of technical skill surpassing even that of the antique standards. This power of expressing, of giving bodily shape, to the ideals and aims, not only of his own epoch, but of humanity in general, is the secret of Donatello's immense influence, an influence felt with hardly less force even in our own day. We

can conceive the delight with which Andrea, trained to consider the imitation of ancient sculpture as his highest ambition, and perhaps already chafing with the sense of restriction, must have breathed in the genial atmosphere; the joy with which he must have felt that harmonious blending of a noble idealism with a human and direct appeal to Nature, which is the grandest achievement of Donatello.

Besides all this, there was his technical perfection to admire, his complete mastery over his tools. Those bronze reliefs, where, on a surface almost flat, figure stands out against figure, plane against plane, receding to a limitless distance in defiance of all difficulties, and even, it must be owned, of the laws of his material: a display of skill which must have been most alluring to the energetic nature of Mantegna. Donatello was achieving triumphantly in sculpture what the Squarcionesques were labouring after in painting—he obtaining something of the effects of painting, as they of sculpture—both, in their experiments, trespassing on the others' domain. Now, it is probable that during the long residence of Donatello in Padua, Andrea, as the adopted son of so important a personage as Squarcione, must have had many opportunities of personal intercourse with him. Young though he was, it is unlikely that so promising a student should have passed unnoticed. But whether he received his impressions from the master's own lips or from a study of his work matters little. It is sufficient that we recognise the importance of the influence and stimulus, and give the honour due to Florence as the foster-mother of the Mantegnesque school.

Another Florentine may have added his own special gift to the boy's artistic training, though it is a hypothesis only. Paolo Uccello was also painting in Padua at this time, and though his work is recorded as being merely figures of giants in *chiaroscuro*, yet it is most probable that they were not without background, since his chief preoccupation was in attaining that depth of space, which his mastery over perspective enabled him to give, so converging his lines that they lead the eye inward till it loses itself in the distance of his landscapes.<sup>\*</sup> In this rendering of depth of space, as we shall see later, Mantegna himself was specially successful, and it is quite possible that he may have been aided to his proficiency by studying the now perished frescoes of Paolo.

Thus was passed the boyhood of Mantegna; his mind expanded by contact with all that was best in the world of art and letters, his brain stimulated by experiments in the most baffling technical problems, and his taste trained to perfection by the study of ancient and modern masterpieces. It is no wonder that under such conditions, with his genius and indefatigable energy, the boy should have developed swiftly, so that at the age of seventeen, when he emerges from the obscurity with which nearly five hundred years has veiled his childhood, he was already a fully-equipped painter, eminent enough to receive important commissions from his fellow-townsmen. His first recorded work—the altar-piece for the church of Santa Sofia, a Madonna in glory—is unfortunately

<sup>\*</sup> For example, in his fresco of the *Flood*, in the Chiostro Verde of S. Maria Novella, and his *Battle-piece*, in the Uffizi, etc.

lost, and we must accept Vasari's verdict that it was so excellent that "it seemed to have been painted by an experienced old man, and not by a youth."<sup>1</sup>

Four years later, at the age of twenty-one, he had to paint in fresco over the chief portal of the Santo, figures of SS. Antonio and Bernardino, a work not yet too ruined for us to judge of his technical skill. (Plate 5.) Next year he painted the Ancona, now in the Brera, for the Church of Santa Giustina, so that at the age of twenty-two he had already been employed in important works for three of the chief churches of Padua.<sup>2</sup> The record of his life is one of swift and steady progress, both in the development of his powers and in the appreciation of his countrymen. Soon after, though precisely at what date we do not know, a still more splendid commission awaited him, offering the widest field for his energies. Squarcione, it appears, had received from the head of the Ovetari family, who possessed a chapel in the church of the Eremitani, the order to decorate its walls with stories from the lives of their patron Saints, James and Christopher. Vasari relates that he confided the work to Andrea and his fellow-pupil, Niccolò Pizzolo; but, from the inferior quality of the frescoes in the apse and

<sup>1</sup> Vasari, iii. 387 It is from the inscription on this painting, recorded by Scardeone ("De Antiq. Urb. Patav." p. 372), that we gather the date of his birth. It ran: "Andreas Mantinca patavinus ann. : septem et decem natus, sua manu pinxit 1448." The picture was seen and celebrated in verse by the poet Giov. Battista Maganza, in the 17th century.

<sup>2</sup> It has been necessary to touch on the most important works of Mantegna in these chapters, but being biographical only, I have reserved all analysis to the later part of the book.



vaulting, it is improbable that Mantegna was in any way responsible, either for the general scheme or for the choice of assistants. It is more likely that he was employed by Squarcione like the rest (Pizzolo, Bono da Ferrara, Ansuino da Forlì, and perhaps others whose names are not recorded), and had, like them, his own part specially assigned him; the most important spaces being naturally given to him, as the most skilful among the assistants. We shall study the frescoes in detail later; here I would only draw attention to the steady evolution revealed in his six paintings, from a statuesque immobility, perfect as far as it goes, to a free and natural treatment of the human form; from a pre-occupation with problems of perspective, and a tendency to subordinate the human to the architectural interests, to an ever increasing feeling for portraiture and individual personality. It is not a sudden change, as is so often assumed, but a gradual and steady evolution, to be traced step by step; the logical development of the young genius freeing himself from educational restrictions, and feeling his way towards a realisation of his own *ego*. Vasari, however, considering the change sudden, tries to account for it in his usual anecdotic fashion. He tells us that Andrea, beginning to be held in great esteem, Jacopo Bellini ("the rival of Squarcione," as he calls him) endeavoured to bring about a marriage between him and his daughter Nicolosia, the which thing hearing, Squarcione's manner grew angry towards Andrea, so that they were henceforth enemies, and although in the past he had always praised his pupil's work, from henceforth he

blamed him ever publicly, and in especial for these Eremitani paintings, because, he said, they were like antique marble and had the hardness of it, and none of that tender sweetness which flesh and things of Nature have. Such censure piercing the soul of Andrea, he set about altering his style, and with so much success that the remaining frescoes proved he knew no less how to imitate living and natural objects than those made by art.<sup>1</sup>

Thus Vasari. Modern critics have decided that it was the counsel of Giovanni Bellini which induced him to soften the rigour of his style, and find in the later frescoes direct imitation of his work. This is a reversal of the earlier hypothesis that Giovanni was influenced by Andrea. Does not the actual truth lie in the fact that the similarity of their early style is due to both being influenced by a common teacher, Jacopo? Is not, for example, the striking external resemblance of the two *Gethsemanes* in the National Gallery explained, as we look at the original of both, drawn by Jacopo himself,<sup>2</sup> and find there, besides the general lines of composition, the same austere and elongated figures of the soldiers, the bare trees, the swirling lines of path, and the same curious formation of rock? Not that I would ignore a certain similarity in Mantegna's work of this date to that of Giovanni Bellini. It is not to be denied that several of his paintings—the *Madonna* of S. Zeno in particular—bear a resemblance in type of face, in softer modelling and warmer colour to the Venetian's, but it is a superficial resemblance only, and

<sup>1</sup> I have had to compress Vasari's somewhat lengthy story.

<sup>2</sup> In the Sketch-book of the British Museum.

in essentials the work of the two painters is as different as a sun-lit mountain and a richly-pastured plain. Nurtured at a common source as they were, they speedily diverged to follow each the path indicated by his special temperament. (Plate 13.) The connection has, however, biographical, if not artistic, interest, and it is probable that a close friendship existed between them. Something of truth is contained in Vasari's anecdote. At some date before 1453 (probably, therefore, before the commencement of the frescoes), Andrea *did* marry the daughter of Jacopo Bellini, Nicolosia by name, as we are informed by an important document, dated February 25th of that year, in which she is referred to as already married,<sup>1</sup> and also, in 1455, he *did* break off connection with Squarcione, as we learn from another document which records the cancelling of a contract signed by him eight years previously, binding himself to work for Squarcione. He demanded and obtained his freedom from the Council of Forty, on the ground that he was a minor when the agreement was signed, and that he had besides been deceived by his master. Further than this we know nothing of the cause of the quarrel.<sup>2</sup>

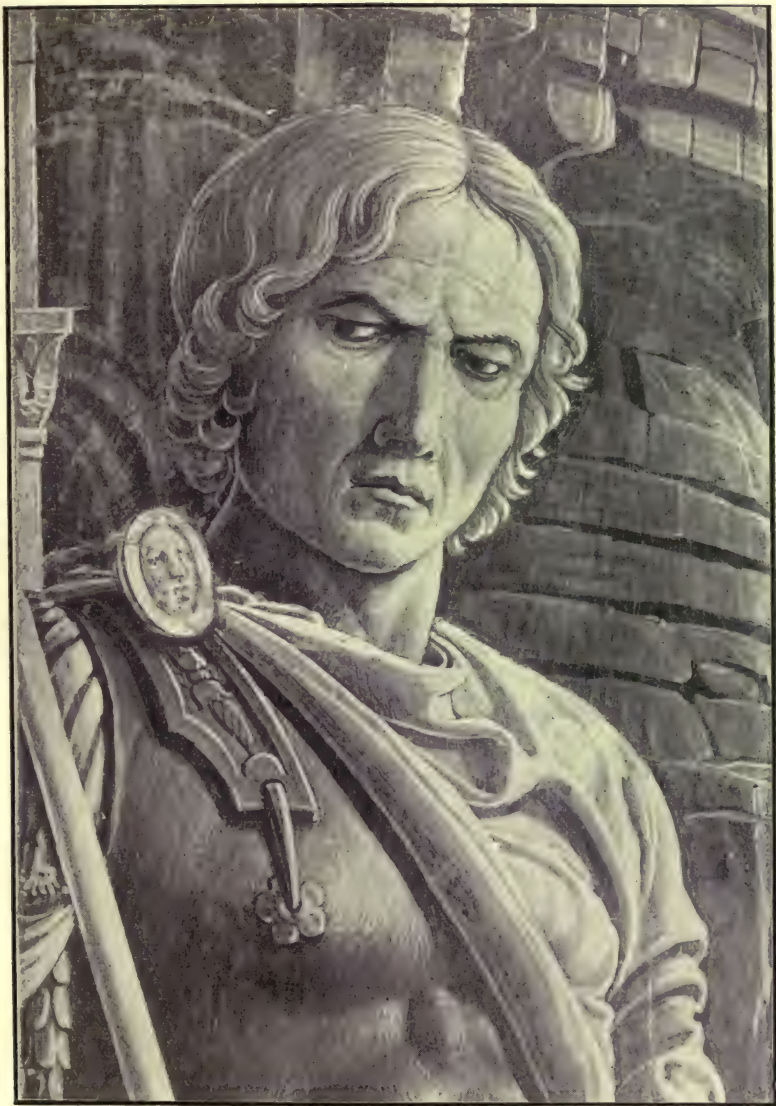
With his newly awakened interest in the personality

<sup>1</sup> The document is as follows :—"1453, 25 Febbraio—Io Franc° de lorenzo straziariolo, o rezuido (dalla Scuola Gr. di S. Giovanni Evangetista) duc. vintj per nome de ser Jachomo belin depintor per sovinzion del maridar de Nicholoxa sua fia." (See Paoletti, Doc. ined., Fasc. 1., p. 9, Padova, 1895.)

<sup>2</sup> From this important document we know that Mantegna was born at Vicenza and not at Padua. It is transcribed at length in M. Yriarte's recent work on Mantegna, Paris, 1901. Its reference in the Venice Archives is as follows : Avog. di Comun. X., Fasc 2, c. 57, and its date, 1455, 2 jan.

of his figures, Mantegna now began to develop that skill in portraiture which was after to bring him such triumph, that grasp and concentration of the essentials of character which gives to his portraits the power of actual life. Whether or no these figures in the Eremitani frescoes really represent the personages Vasari enumerates cannot be determined, but one head at least we can identify, from its resemblance to the bronze of S. Andrea. In the stern, blonde soldier standing apart, in the fresco of S. James before Cæsar, he has painted his own face. (Plate 3.) And what a face for a man not yet thirty years old! Only a youth passed in profoundest study and laborious struggle could have furrowed those deep lines in brow and cheek. His triumphs were not won without severe sacrifice, but the reward was proportionate to the cost. The fame of the frescoes spread throughout Italy, and Padua crowned his head with her greenest laurels. The success of the school was assured, and its aims more than realised. Beyond its vision of mere revival, the genius of Mantegna had soared, and truer and more pregnant ideals shot up from the dry stem. Henceforth the school of Padua, no longer Squarcionesque, but with Mantegna for its chief, ranked and kept abreast with that of Florence, and stamped its impress upon an almost equal number of disciples, among them some of the noblest painters of the age. And with that generous enthusiasm characteristic of the earnest worker of all times and of the Renaissance in particular, his genius was at once recognised and applauded in fullest measure. He was courted and caressed by scholars and princes, book swere dedicated





*Alinari photo*]

[*Eremitani, Padua*

HEAD OF MANTEGNA]



to him, and poems (with the inevitable Apelles comparison), were composed to his glory in the somewhat sycophantish style of the day. Commissions poured in upon him. Prelates and nobles clamoured for his work. He painted the portraits of the celebrated scholars, Galeotto Marzio and Giovanni Pannonio, and was eulogized by the latter for his success, and the great warrior-priest, Cardinal Scarampi, visiting his native city in 1459, sat to him.

But Padua was not to be left in undisputed possession of her brilliant son. Even before the completion of the frescoes, Lodovico Gonzaga, Marquis of Mantua, one of the most powerful and cultivated princes of Italy, had expressed his desire to have the famous painter at his court, and from thenceforward spared no pains to induce him to enter his service, for a long time without success. This prince, brave soldier, wise ruler, and enthusiastic patron of art and letters, is one of the most delightful figures of the fifteenth century. He, as well as his wife, Barbara of Brandenburg, had been educated by Vittorino da Feltre, and doubtless owed the development of their noble qualities to his gentle guidance. Under their rule the court of Mantua had the reputation of being the most cultured and brilliant of its day. Both were excellent judges in matters of art, and keenly appreciative of the dignity of stately and beautiful surroundings. Lodovico possessed a fine collection of antiquities and a magnificent library, and nothing gave him so much delight as building wonderful castles, and turning his marshy territory into a fairyland of palaces. Besides the glory of attaching the famous artist to his service, it was a

matter of great importance to have so skilful a painter to adorn these buildings with frescoes, and he urged and persisted, in spite of much unwillingness on the part of Andrea to leave the city whose atmosphere was so congenial to his tastes. His first address was made early in the year 1457; but although Mantegna appears to have received the proposal favourably, yet excuse after excuse was sent in answer to the letters and messages which poured in upon him. Now it was the altar-piece for the Abbot of S. Zeno, now a painting for the Podestà of Padua. After fifteen months of vain appeal, the Marquis, doubtless thinking that his offers had not been sufficiently attractive, wrote with fresh fervour—"We promise you a provision of fifteen ducats a month, a habitation where you may dwell with your family, as much corn and wood every year as is sufficient for six people, and the cost of the journey hither. . . . Have no fear," he concluded, "that if our offer appears to you too small, we shall seek in every way to satisfy your demands."<sup>1</sup> But all was unavailing. Spring and summer brought fresh appeals in vain. The Marquis was particularly anxious that Mantegna should see and advise as to the decoration of his castle chapel. "Come even for one day," he pleaded, in a letter dated June 28th, 1459, "so that we may have your opinion before we proceed further." The letters cease here, and we may presume that his perseverance was at length rewarded, and Andrea persuaded, after a delay of over two years, to enter his service.

<sup>1</sup> The series of letters passing between Lodovico and Mantegna was discovered by M. Armand Baschet, and published by him in the "*Gazette des Beaux Arts*," "*Documents sur Mantegna*," xx., 1 Per., p. 322, etc.



## CHAPTER II

### LIFE IN MANTUA

THE interest of the Marquis in the decoration of his chapel at the time of Mantegna's departure from Padua, leads to the presumption that his first employment on his arrival in Mantua was the painting of its altar-piece. This would seem, without doubt, to be the Tryptych of the Uffizi, which until the siege of Mantua, still remained in possession of the Gonzaga family. Another work may also be placed in these first years, during which the documents are silent—*The Death of the Virgin*, now in Madrid, with its view of the Mantuan lake crossed by the Ponte S. Giorgio.

The first documentary record we have of him is a letter of December, 1463, dated from Goito, a favourite hunting castle of the Marquis, on the decoration of which he was employed. (Now, alas! so far from any vestige of his work remaining, the very building itself has vanished, and only a few ruined walls survive to show its beautiful position on the banks of the swiftly-flowing Mincio.) This letter contains a demand for his salary, unpaid for four months, the first hint at those financial difficulties which so constantly harassed his life in Mantua. Lodovico, with his luxurious tastes and his passion for building, was often short of money, a time of peace meaning a time of empty treasuries, as Mantegna many times experienced. On this occasion,

however, he had not long to wait, the Marquis sending him on the same day part of the money—thirty ducats—with promise of speedy payment of the rest. From Goito he seems to have been sent to paint in the neighbouring palace of Cavriana, but there also no vestige of his work remains, and of the first six years of his life in Mantua we have no further notice.

In the summer of 1466 he was sent to Florence, to confer with the Marquis' agent, Giovanni Aldobrandini, on some business connected with the building of the tribuna, in the church of the SS. Annunziata, for which Lodovico was responsible.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately, we hear little of a visit which must have been of supreme interest to Mantegna himself and to the whole circle of Florentine artists; no record of the meeting with Donatello, who had still six months to live, and who must have followed his career with delight, seeing in him the inheritor of his own aims and achievements. Fra Filippo had just completed the Prato frescoes. Paolo Uccello was still immersed in problems of perspective. All were in Florence, but no echo has reached us of their welcome and their sympathy. Only a bald record by Aldobrandini himself, who in a letter to the Marquis, speaks of his envoy in the following pompous terms—"I perceive that Andrea, not only in painting, but in many other things, is possessed of perfect knowledge and consummate intelligence, and deserves my highest commendation."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The inscription round the tribuna records that the building was completed in 1477.

<sup>2</sup> Dated July 5th, 1466. Pub. by C. D'Arco. "*Delle Arte e degli Artefici di Mantova*," ii., 12.

It has been generally assumed that during this visit, Mantegna's interest was first aroused in the process of engraving, begun twelve years before by Tommaso Finiguerra. It is, however, highly improbable that an invention of such importance should, considering the constant intercourse between Florence and Padua, have remained unknown to the Paduan artists, and the evidence of Mantegna's own engravings, as we shall see later, shows that he must already have made his first trials as far back as the painting of the Eremitani frescoes.

Andrea seems to have spent only four months in Florence,<sup>\*</sup> for in December he was already back in Mantua, as we learn from a letter in which he tells the Marquis of his desire to enlarge his house, and asks for a forestalment of his salary in order to "prepare the bricks and mortar." He seems to have been bitten by the Gonzaga mania for building. Like them he loved to live in stately and luxurious fashion, and this was the first of many expenses incurred by a constant change of residence, and a lavish outlay on building and adornment. The painter of grand architecture and exquisite detail of carving and decoration required in his own home the reality of these things. Moreover, like all men of genius he needed quiet and freedom from too close human contact, and it may be that in his seeming restlessness, it was this peace he sought. In his first house we know, from a letter of 1468 addressed to the Marquis, that he was constantly annoyed by his

<sup>\*</sup> In 1467 Mantegna seems to have visited Pisa, but the sole record is that an official banquet was given in his honour on July 3rd of that year.

neighbours — ill-conditioned people, who, he complained, insulted his wife with gross language whenever she went out—an outrage which, we are glad to hear, was speedily repressed by the Podestà.

He was employed by the Marquis in many kinds of work, great and small indifferently. For instance, in 1469, we find him desired to draw from nature two guinea-fowls, a cock and a hen, that they might be worked in tapestry from his design; and not long after this trifling employment, he must have begun his plans for the famous frescoes of the Castello, which mark the second great epoch in his career. Here, in the small room looking over the reedy lake, Mantegna has put forth all the strength of his mature powers and achieved a work of so much grandeur that only the Pharoahs have been more imposingly commemorated than these Gonzaga Princes. There is, indeed, in the serenity and gravity of the figures something which impresses the beholder like the stately statues of Egypt—significant, massive, and solemn. We shall study the paintings in detail later. Here I would merely draw attention to the vivid and varied personality stamped on each of these portrait heads. The impersonal painter of the early Eremitani frescoes has now developed the widest comprehension of humanity and its emotions. No phase of character is too complex for him. Volumes of words would not acquaint us better with the personality of these people—the gentle benignity of the war-stiffened old Marquis, the uprightness and sagacity of his wife, the genial *bonhomie* of the elder sons, the peevish melancholy of the boy-protonotary. We need no document to tell





*Anderson photo*

THE FAMILY OF LODOVICO GONZAGA

PLATE 4

[*Castello, Mantua*]



us what an astute diplomatist was the secretary, what a sensitive humourist the poet, what a prudent guardian of conventions the duenna. (Plate 4.) But with all this minute attention to character, Mantegna never loses sight of the broad effects, and has conceived his figures on a scale so noble that the chamber has the air of a temple over whose rites these silent and solemn images preside. Were these Gonzagas really such imposing personages, their courtiers one and all so dignified, and even their horses and dogs such lordly creatures? Did not perhaps the painter invest them with something of the grandeur of his own nature? And if to-day, ruined by time and repaint, they are yet able to impress so strongly their personality upon us, what must not their effect have been on those who saw them in all their original splendour! The frescoes rank as one of the grandest monuments by which the memory of a great race has ever been perpetuated.

The Cardinal, whose portrait twice figures on these walls, with his air of genial indolence, seems to have had a special liking for Mantegna, with whom he had much in common in his love of art and of antiquities. On one occasion, apparently during the painting of the frescoes, having to spend a few days at Bologna, and needing entertainment, he begged his father to allow Andrea to go to him. "I shall take pleasure," he wrote,<sup>1</sup> "in showing him my cameos and heads of bronze, and other beautiful antique things, about which we can study and confer together."

The great frescoes were finished, as the inscription records, in 1474. Since then the city has been

<sup>1</sup> Letter of July 18, 1472.

battered and pillaged till little but the mildewed walls of its vast palaces remain, but in this dusty chamber the Gonzaga lords still live the stately life breathed into their nostrils by Mantegna four hundred years ago, serenely indifferent to the destruction and decay around them, fit occupants of the fierce old fortress whose bastions cut the air like the keel of a war-ship.

It is vexatious at a time of such noble achievements to have to record certain petty annoyances, which, like gnat-stings chafed and galled Mantegna in the midst of his triumphs—thieves stealing his fruit in the garden of his country house, litigation as to the limits between his own estate and the next, and, of more importance, the repeated forgery of his engravings by Zoan Andrea and his accomplice, Simone Ardizioni. This last injury Mantegna himself avenged in the most summary manner, causing the culprits to be waylaid and thrashed till they were left for dead, as Simone himself relates.<sup>1</sup>

Probably, as a reward for the frescoes, and to procure the painter a more tranquil home, in 1476 the Marquis made him the gift of an estate near the church of S. Sebastiano, where he now began to build another house. A noble house it must have been, judging from the few fragments of the original building still remaining.<sup>2</sup> Most of its outside traces have vanished, but within is yet to be seen the beautiful rotonda or central courtyard, with its dainty terra-cotta mouldings

<sup>1</sup> Letter published by Karl Brun in the "*Zeitschrift für Bildende Kunst*," vol. xi, 1875-6. The other incidents are from Baschet's collection of documents, already referred to.

<sup>2</sup> It is now used as a technical college.



in the manner of the chapel of S. Andrea. This, with a stone recording the date of gift, is all that remains of the house of Mantegna, once covered inside and out with paintings by himself and his sons.

The expenses of this new building, and the dowering of his daughter, caused him two years later fresh financial difficulties. Gifts of land he had received from Lodovico, but his salary was, as usual, unpaid. In a letter of May 13th, 1478, he reminds the Marquis, that so far from the promises made to induce him to leave Padua having been fulfilled, after nineteen years' labour he was still poor and unrewarded. To these reproaches Lodovico replied with his usual kindly dignity. He apologised for the neglect on the ground of his own straits, but he assured Mantegna of payment, even if to raise the money he should have to sell his own possessions. It is significant of the ups and downs of these Italian princes that his jewels, he confesses, were already pledged. This letter was the last the aged Marquis wrote to Andrea. Three weeks later he died, after a rule of thirty-four years, leaving to his son Federigo the responsibilities of his debts.

The new Marquis had inherited all the artistic tastes of his father, with his love of luxury and gorgeous houses, and he continued to Mantegna the same affectionate kindness and appreciation. He seems to have employed him in decorating his palaces both at Marmirolo and in Mantua, but we have only the barest record of the fact. Andrea, during his short rule, was at the highest point of worldly success, receiving commissions from all parts of Italy, many of which had to be refused. Giovanni delle Rovere, Prefect of Rome,

begged in vain for a picture, and the Duchess of Milan that he would paint her portrait. Federigo himself was the mediator on this occasion. She wished it to be painted, not from herself, but from an unsatisfactory portrait, which was to be improved by Andrea, but this he peremptorily refused to do. "These excellent painters," the Marquis wrote to her apologetically, "are generally so capricious that we must content ourselves with accepting what they are willing to give."<sup>1</sup> In 1483 Lorenzo dei Medici, passing through Mantua on his way from Venice, paid a visit to his house at S. Sebastiano, and expressed his delight with all he saw of his own work and his fine collection of antiquities. Famous, and caressed by all the princes of Italy, and at the zenith of his success, the nature of Mantegna seems to have grown freer and happier under its genial influence. In his work of this period there is fresh buoyancy and breadth. His figures have a heroic bearing, a frank and fearless glance, which is certainly expressive of the painter's own mood.<sup>2</sup> With an increased freedom of brushwork, he adopted about this time the use of canvas in preference to panel, which he thenceforward employed almost exclusively.

In 1484, the smoothness of his life was for the moment disturbed by the death of Federigo, and he again lost an affectionate and appreciative patron. The new Marquis Gianfrancesco was but a boy, and Mantegna seems to have been somewhat mistrustful of his future

<sup>1</sup> From Baschet's coll., dated June 20, 1480.

<sup>2</sup> For example, in *The Holy Family* of Dresden, the *Maaonna and Saints* of Turin, and the *Hortus Inclusus* of Dr Mond.

under his rule. It may be that during Lorenzo dei Medici's visit to his studio the previous year, he had made certain promises to Andrea, for now, depressed at Federigo's death, and dreading changes under a new prince, he wrote to offer his services at the Florentine court.<sup>1</sup> What answer he received we do not hear, but happily his fears were groundless, and Gianfrancesco not only showed him the same affection as his father and grandfather, but proved himself an equally intelligent patron of art. This prince, whose face is so familiar to us in medals and portraits, with its bush of black hair and negro-like features, had already at the age of eighteen achieved a brilliant reputation as a soldier and poet. He was specially distinguished for his horsemanship, and seems besides to have inherited all the intellectual tastes of his family. Mantegna's first employment after his accession was the carrying out of a design, which, however, was probably conceived before the death of Federigo—the grand *Procession of the Triumph of Julius Cæsar*. This series of paintings which now, ruined by barbarous handling, hangs in the Palace of Hampton Court, is perhaps the most purely personal of all Mantegna's works, and we know from his own words what delight he took in it. But there were many and long interruptions before the nine large canvases were completed. First a Madonna must be painted for the Duchess of Ferrara, to whose daughter, the beautiful and brilliant Isabella d'Este, the Marquis was betrothed. Later, in the year 1498, came a request from Innocent VIII. that Mantegna might be sent to

<sup>1</sup> This letter is given in full in Crowe and Cavalcaselle, "Painting in North Italy," vol. i., p. 398.

decorate his new chapel in the Vatican, and however unwilling Francesco might be to part with his painter for so long, yet the Pope could not be refused, and the *Triumph* was again laid aside unfinished. Andrea departed for Rome, having first received the honour of knighthood, and was most graciously welcomed by the Pope and all his court. He seems for over two years<sup>1</sup> to have been engaged upon the frescoes, and it is terrible to know the fate of so important a work, painted at this, his noblest, period. At the end of the last century the entire chapel was destroyed to make way for the Braccia Nuova, and the priceless treasures of Mantegna's painting ruthlessly sacrificed. We read in the pages of Vasari and Ridolfi full descriptions of the frescoes: over the altar were scenes of the Nativity, the Adoration of the Magi, and the Baptism; the Virgin between four saints with Pope Innocent on his knees at her feet; in the lunette, the sacrifice of Isaac; on the roof, the four Evangelists; and round the walls, symbolic figures of the virtues and the vices. "So minutely were they painted," says Vasari, "and with so much care and love, that they appear rather like miniatures than ordinary paintings."<sup>2</sup> They were signed "Andreas Mantinia Civis Patavinus," and with the addition of his new title "*Eques Auratæ Militiæ*," for the first and only time, as far as we know. Unlike

<sup>1</sup> From the documents we gather that he left Mantua shortly after June 2d, 1488 (letter from the Marquis to Pope Innocent VIII), and returned in September, 1490 (letter from the Pope to the Marquis, Sep. 6, 1490).

These, with all the following documents, are published by D'Arco. "Delle Arte e degli Artefici di Mantova." (Mantova, 1857 vol. ii.).

<sup>2</sup> Vasari, iii, 400



Titian and Crivelli, Mantegna was not heedful of his new nobility.

We have several records of this Roman visit in his letters to the Marquis, to whom he writes, describing all the things most likely to interest or to amuse him. He speaks much of the celebrated Turkish Prince Djem, then a prisoner in the Vatican, of his appearance and barbarous habits. He tells his own experiences. He was in high favour with all in the palace, he wrote; but the Pope, though gracious, was not generous, and after a year's labour he had received nothing but his board.<sup>1</sup> He thought regretfully of his unfinished *Triumph*, and gave special directions to protect it from injury. He was anxious for the welfare of his family—his *brigata*, as he calls it—and specially recommended to the care of the Marquis his son Lodovico, for whom he craved a benefice.

In December of this year, 1489, Francesco grew impatient of his prolonged absence. He was about to celebrate his marriage with the daughter of the Duke of Ferrara, and he urgently needed the aid of Mantegna in the festivities. He wrote pressingly, both to Pope and painter, but he was doomed to disappointment—for, in February, when the marriage took place, Andrea was ill in bed with a painful swelling of the

<sup>1</sup> Ridolfi's anecdote *apropos* of the Pope's want of liberality is worth repeating. Being commanded to paint the seven deadly sins, Mantegna placed beside them an eighth figure, whereupon the Pope asked him what it did there, the vices being but seven. Andrea replied meaningly that it was *Ingratitude*, which he had added as being the worst of all. The Pope, perceiving his drift, said smiling, "On this side then paint the seven virtues, and for the eighth add *Patience*, which is not inferior to any of the rest." (Ridolfi, "Meraviglie," p. 114). Vasari's version is much inferior in point.

leg, and quite unable to mount a horse. It was not till the following autumn he was able to leave Rome, carrying with him the benediction and grateful appreciation of the Pope. Whether he was substantially rewarded, we do not hear; but, in any case, he returned to Mantua richer than he left it, with the glamour of the Eternal City henceforth upon his work. What he gained from Rome and her classic atmosphere, some drawings of this time best tell. Never did even Mantegna conceive statelier forms, more deeply imbued with the austere beauty of antiquity, than the *Judith* of the Uffizi, and the *Diana and Venus* of the British Museum. Doubtless, also, the *Procession of Caesar*, to which he now returned, gained much in rich detail and local colouring from his two years residence in Rome, and the study of her Triumphal Arches. To this work he returned with renewed enthusiasm, and the next two years were devoted to its completion. The canvases were first placed in the Marquis' favourite palace of S. Sebastiano, close to Mantegna's own house, but the light material on which they were painted made them easily transferable, and we hear later of six of them forming the stage-background in the Castello theatre, during a representation of a play of Terence.<sup>1</sup> Their subsequent history we shall follow later, with the tragedy of their almost total obliteration by repaint.

The Marquis, it would seem, was delighted with the noble work. He rewarded the painter with a fresh

<sup>1</sup> See the letter from Sigismondo Cantelmo to the Duke of Ferrara, dated Feb. 23, 1501, where, after describing the theatre, he writes: "una delle Bande era ornata delle sei quadri del Cesareo triumphe per man del singulare Mantengha." (Campori, "Lett. Art. Ined.," p. 3 and 4.)

grant of land, exempt from all taxes, and from henceforth, for the first time, Mantegna appears to have looked upon Mantua as his permanent home. He had always proudly signed himself Citizen of Padua, and had till now kept his old house there, perhaps with the view of ultimately returning, but in this year, 1492, he sold it, and settled down for good in Mantua, seeming for the moment to have been entirely free from financial difficulties.

Meantime the court had gained fresh brilliance from the presence of the new Marchioness, Isabella d'Este, a princess, even in those days of highly cultured women, famous for her wit and learning. At the time of her marriage she was only sixteen, but was already a skilled musician, and a student deeply versed in classic literature. We have her profile,<sup>1</sup> drawn in her twenty-fifth year by Leonardo—a keen and delicate face, sparkling with bright life and intelligence. During the absences of her husband on military service, she governed the state with wisdom and ability, and maintained the reputation of the court for splendour and culture. Not many years after her marriage the Marquis was often absent, for in 1494, Charles VIII. had begun the expedition which cost Italy so dear, and as generalissimo of the Italian League, Francesco was constantly in the field. One of his battles is immortalised by Mantegna in his superb altar-piece of the *Madonna of Victory*. In 1495, he took his troops—a vast army—to the banks of the Taro, to intercept the king as he returned from Naples, laden with plunder, and at

<sup>1</sup> The red chalk profile in the Louvre, drawn presumably between 1499 and 1500.

Fornovo the famous battle was fought, in which over three thousand Italians were left dead on the field. Before setting out, the Marquis had sworn to the Virgin that, in the event of victory, he would erect a chapel to her glory ; and, as the French, in continuing their homeward journey, were forced to leave behind much plunder, in spite of the three thousand slain he chose to consider himself the victor, and in fulfilment of his vow built his chapel, and called upon Mantegna to paint an altar-piece to the glory of himself and of the Virgin. Painted at the age of sixty-five, it is perhaps the most poetic, most nobly conceived of all Mantegna's easel-pictures. The Marquis kneels, a typical *preux chevalier*, clad in dainty armour and embroidered *surtout*, under special protection of the Virgin and the chief soldier-saints. It was placed on the altar of the votive church (of which Mantegna is said to have been the architect) in 1496, and now, by a strange freak of fortune, hangs in the gallery of the people whose supposed defeat it celebrated.

It would really seem from his work of this time, as though Mantegna drank fresh draughts of life with his increasing years, becoming ever more aware of its bright and joyous side. In the first years of the new century, when he was seventy years of age, he must have painted the two classic scenes now in the Louvre, where landscape and figures are treated almost with the gaiety of a Venetian pastoral. They were intended for the private study of the Marchioness, and in the little blue and gold chamber overlooking the lake, on which she has so exquisitely impressed her personality, we may still see the spaces they filled. Was it perhaps the



radiant life she brought into the court which inspired his mood? One must, in spite of after apparent coldness, suppose that they were friends, he enjoying the delicate charm of her intelligence, she appreciating his great genius.

That she was not always satisfied with his work, however, we have evidence in some documents published by Luzio,<sup>1</sup> in which we read that three years after her marriage (Jan. 1493) she commissioned him to paint her portrait, as a gift for the Countess d'Acerra, afterwards Queen of Naples. The portrait was finished the following April, but Isabella expressed herself so dissatisfied with the likeness as to be unable to send it. "The painter has done it so badly that it has not the least resemblance to us," she wrote, "and we have sent for a stranger who is reported to paint likenesses (*contrafare*) well and naturally." This stranger was no other than Giovanni Santi, the father of Raffaello, who had been eulogized to the Marchioness by her sister-in-law, the Duchess of Urbino, whose court-painter he was. Apparently his portrait gave more satisfaction than Mantegna's, for in 1494 it was sent to the Countess with a letter in which Isabella modestly affirms that her face was not of so much beauty as to merit reproduction, an assertion which both Leonardo's portrait and the medals contradict. Of what immense interest would be the discovery of the accepted and rejected paintings! The incident reveals a strange lapse from the general high artistic standard and delicate taste of the Marchioness.

It is not much insight we ever get into Mantegna's

<sup>1</sup> Luzio. "I Rittatti d' Isabella d' Este." "Emporium," May and June 1900. Bergamo.

private life, but at this time a few facts are revealed by the documents. By his wife Nicolosia, daughter of Jacopo Bellini, he had two sons, Francesco and Lodovico,<sup>1</sup> whom he had trained to be his assistants, and who imitated the external characteristics of his work so ably that many of their paintings, especially those of Lodovico, are not unnaturally attributed to him. Lodovico was in high favour at court, was appointed *cameriere d'onore* to the Marquis, and had received a grant of land near that of his father at S. Sebastiano. Francesco, on the other hand, seems to have been a hopeless *mauvais sujet*, in constant disgrace with the Marquis, and a source of much anxiety to his father. There was one daughter, Taddea, married in 1499 to a certain Antonio Viani, and handsomely dowered by Mantegna. In his later years, after the death of his wife, he had born to him an illegitimate son, Gian-Andrea, for whom he had a deep affection. In 1504 when he drew up his first will, he shows much loving care for this child of his old age. In the same will he made provision for his last resting place. Seventy-three years old and in failing health, he knew that death could not be far off. As all his life he had loved stately surroundings, so in his death he required a like magnificence, and he began to negotiate for the purchase of a chapel in S. Andrea, and to plan out its elaborate scheme of decoration. The record now is a melancholy one, telling of continual care and pecuniary difficulties. His son

<sup>1</sup> M. Yriarte supposes, with reason, that Bernardino, generally called his son by the biographers, was his assistant only, who adopted his name according to the custom of the time.

Francesco had been banished by the Marquis, and not all his father's prayers procured his pardon. Isabella herself interceded, touched by his sorrow. He had come to implore her aid, she wrote to her husband in a letter dated April 1st, 1505, "all weeping and agitated, and so fallen away in face that he seemed more dead than alive," and she pleaded for the recall of the banished son, "gravely as he has sinned, for the sake of the long service, the incomparable ability and high merits of the father." It must have been a grave offence, indeed, for we know that this appeal was vain, and that the following year he was still forbidden to enter the gates of Mantua.

But not all the cares of debt and disappointment robbed Mantegna of his energy. The genius in him was as vigorous and virile as ever, and there is no trace in his last works of depression of spirit or of failing power. He was engaged in the very last months of his life on a large painting of Comus for the Marchioness. This work, described by her secretary in a letter of July 15th, 1506, and not then finished, is unfortunately lost, but three paintings are preserved, which, found in the studio after his death, date almost certainly from his last years, the *S. Sebastian*, belonging to Baron Franchetti of Venice, *The Dead Christ* of the Brera, and the *Scipio* of our own gallery. The latter is probably the last work from his hand, yet the figures are modelled with as firm a strength, as statuesque a beauty, as ever. It is a noble picture with which to close the record of his labours.

Life and work were drawing to an end, and the history of the last months is a sad one. In urgent

need of money to pay for a house bought some years previously, he was constrained to part with the dearest treasure he possessed, a fine antique head of Faustina, the gem of his collection. This had been often coveted by collectors, and now in January, 1506, he wrote to the Marchioness to offer her the bust—"his dear Faustina"—for the sum of one hundred ducats. It is a letter full of pathos. "Since I must part with it," he wrote, "I would rather your excellency had it than any lord or madonna in the world." It is difficult to account for the seeming neglect of Isabella in these last months towards a man for whom she had expressed so much admiration, and whose life had been spent in the service of her court. The fact, however, remains, that, so far from giving him any aid, it was not till the following summer she took any notice of his letter. It was the time when Mantua was ravaged by the plague, and she had retired to her villa of Sacchetta, whence in July she despatched her secretary, Jacopo Calandra, to bring back the bust for her approval, and—alas, for her generosity!—to cheapen the price. Her envoy was much moved at the interview with the aged painter. Mantegna, he wrote on August 1st, had been deeply hurt by her silence; he had absolutely refused to part with the bust for less than the hundred ducats. He had, however, confided it to him, with great ceremony and so much jealousy, that Calandra felt sure if he might not see it again within six days he would die of grief. It would have been satisfactory to record that Isabella returned his treasure and relieved him from his difficulties, but no such generous thought seems to have occurred to



her and the bust was added to the Gonzaga collection.<sup>1</sup>

Calandra's words were fatally prophetic. Little more than a month later, at the age of seventy-five, Mantegna died,<sup>2</sup> his end undoubtedly hastened by the anxieties of his debts—anxieties which now devolved upon his son. The unaccountable indifference of the Gonzagas seems to have continued. Isabella, in a letter to her husband, then on military service in Perugia, announced his death casually and without comment, and the paintings found in the studio were seized by the Marquis' brother, Sigismondo, Bishop of Mantua, to pay for the chapel in S. Andrea, and Lodovico had to appeal for protection, since these pictures were all they had with which to satisfy the creditors and fulfil their father's wishes as to his last resting-place. It is to the honour of the sons that, in spite of the heavy debts, these wishes were accomplished. The chapel where he is laid is a fit shrine for his remains. Its walls are frescoed all over with deep-hued garlands and fruits, and with allegoric figures in Mantegna's own grand manner. In the centre of the cupola glows the *stemma* with its device—a red sun and golden crown<sup>3</sup>—framed in green foliage and delicate mouldings of terra-cotta. From the four angles the four Evangelists gaze down, seated

<sup>1</sup> In the Museo, Mantua, is still to be seen the bust which is supposed to have belonged to Mantegna, but although a fairly good copy, it is yet too poor to have received the enthusiasm of so exquisite a *connoisseur* of Roman sculpture as Mantegna. It would be interesting to know what collection possesses the treasure.

<sup>2</sup> Mantegna died on the 13th of September, 1506.

<sup>3</sup> It is the Gonzaga *stemma*. In 1469 Lodovico granted to Mantegna ("carissimum familiarem nostrum,") the use of his own device with a slight reservation. See Doc. pub. by Davari, "Arch. Stor." 1888, p. 82.

against a dark background of leaves, and on the walls hang paintings, probably begun by Mantegna and left unfinished at his death. Fifty years later, Andrea, the child of Lodovico, caused to be placed near the entrance the superb bronze head which typifies so well the spirit of the dead master.

. . . . .

Ridolfi records that Albrecht Dürer, on his way to Mantua to visit Mantegna, was met before his arrival by the melancholy news of his death, and was wont to say in after years that no sadder thing had ever befallen him.<sup>1</sup> The two had much in common in the studious and austere bent of their genius, and in the earnestness and energy with which they pursued their aims. Dürer, in his mode of expression and in the extent of his influence upon contemporary art, is the Mantegna of the North.

. . . . .

Of the family there is little more to tell. Francesco was again received into favour, and employed by Isabella in certain paintings in the palace, but he seems to have been unworthy of his pardon. We read that, Lodovico dying three years later, he pounced upon his property, and the widow Libera had to appeal for protection against him. Later again he was in disgrace at court, and the last record we have of him is a letter to the young

<sup>1</sup> Ridolfi, "Meraviglie," p. 115.

prince Federigo, aged thirteen, imploring his intercession and aid!

In summing up the character of Mantegna as it reveals itself in his work and the contemporary records, we find the chief note struck throughout to be a gigantic and unflagging Energy, revealing itself in its higher phases by the nobility and magnitude of his ideals and in the perfection of all he undertakes, and in its less admirable aspects by an imperious and somewhat intolerant temper. This impatience of mediocrity and of insolence is the worst that can be said of him, and has been already too much dwelt upon by his biographers. The few trifling documents which recount his not unnatural resentment of injury have been given too disproportionate a place in a life whose grandeur is written in his work and in his influence upon his fellows. No vices are recorded of him—no levities even. His place as a scholar, even in those days, was a high one. He was honoured by all men, and the trusted friend of the princes in whose service he worked. "He lived grandly," writes Scardeone, "enjoyed wide celebrity, mighty princes delighted in his company."<sup>1</sup> And Vasari: "He was of such gentle and praiseworthy manners in all his actions that the memory of him will endure throughout the world."<sup>2</sup>

It is a magnificent figure we may construct out of the testimony of his own work. Strong of soul, self-reliant, self-disciplined, the wealth of his many-sided

<sup>1</sup> Scardeone, p. 371.

<sup>2</sup> Vasari, iii, 408.

nature reveals itself in the variety of his types and in his sympathy for all aspects of Nature, from the austere strength of youth, free-limbed, free-souled, to the tenderness of the sorrowing mother, the play of small creatures, and the fragile life of delicate plants. No side of life is unfelt by him. He touches all with love and comprehension.



## CHAPTER III

### EARLY WORK IN PADUA—EREMITANI FRESCOES,

1452-1459

IN the foregoing chapters I have tried as far as possible to keep the matter purely biographical. The following pages are devoted to a detailed study of Mantegna's principal works in the approximate order of painting, an order which, since few of them are dated, must necessarily be, in places, hypothetical.

In glancing over the early environment of Mantegna, and the influences which helped to direct the course of his development, I have perhaps dwelt too little upon the strength of his own personality, which was an impressing rather than an impressionable one. No painter ever pursued his course with more consistency, with clearer aims, more definite aspirations, or with greater self-reliance. From the first there is no sign of hesitation, little even that can be called tentative. He grapples with and overcomes one difficulty, and at once proceeds to the next, conscious always of a goal beyond his present vision. From his high standard he never lapses. He scales one height, knowing that from it a wider range will reveal itself. *We* may make arbitrary pauses in studying his development, but Mantegna goes steadily upwards, turning neither to the right hand nor to the left, and his history is

one of continual expansion and progress up to the last years of his life.

The first existing work, painted at the age of twenty-one, is the fresco over the chief entrance of the Santo in Padua, representing SS. Antonio and Bernardino supporting the sacred initials. (Plate 5.) Much injured by weather and repaint, we yet find in its least ruined parts a perfection of perspective, and a plasticity of modelling, which show a complete mastery over a painter's most difficult problems. The figures are skilfully adapted to the view of the spectator below, and give the sense of great solidity. They are set well and deeply within the space enclosed. It is hardly perhaps necessary to add that the initials with their surrounding rays are of metal, and of a later date, nor that the inscription (ANDREAS MANTEGNA OPTVMO FAVENTE NVMINE PERFECIT, MCCCCLII XI KAL. SEXTIL.) is cut in the stone.

For convenience sake I have used the word *fresco* in speaking of Mantegna's wall paintings, but he never used the true fresco method from which the word is derived; that is to say, working on damp or *fresh* plaster. He painted invariably on a dry plaster called *stucco lucido*, a far less durable process, since the colour does not, as in true fresco, become incorporated with it, and hence is liable to flake off, as has happened in so many of his paintings. His panel pictures and canvases seem invariably to have been painted in tempera, glazed more or less heavily with varnish, which gives them sometimes the appearance of oil paintings.

Mantegna's earliest existing panel-painting is the



Anaerson photo

SANT'ANTONIO AND SAN BERNARDINO

[Il Santo, Paaua





Ancona now in the Brera. (Plate 6.) This was executed for the altar of S. Luke in the church of Santa Giustina, and was finished in 1454, when he was in his twenty-fourth year.<sup>1</sup> Although here, following the traditions of the Gothic ancona, the figures are isolated and motionless, and thus no problems of movement or composition have been attempted, within its limits the painting is beyond praise both in nobility of feeling and in technical excellence, an astounding achievement for so young a painter. It is divided into two courses. In the middle of the lower, S. Luke, larger than the surrounding saints, is seated against a gold background. Right are SS. Benedict and Eufemia; left, SS. Prosdocimo and Scolastica. Above is a *Pietà*, with a bishop and S. George on one side, a deacon and S. Jerome on the other. All stand solid and firmly balanced within their niches, solemn and impressive as grand statues. The draperies are skilfully yet simply arranged to show the forms beneath, with none of the sharp and corrugated folds peculiar to the Squarcionesques. The faces are noble and inspired, the attitudes superbly majestic and untrammelled. The colours are clean and beautiful in themselves, and harmoniously combined, as the good preservation of the panels allows us to appreciate. Again we observe that skilful adaptation of the perspective to the view of the beholder which we have already noticed in the lunette. Even among the many splendid masterpieces by which it is surrounded, we find our attention rivetted by the grandeur of this wonderful

<sup>1</sup> The contract was signed in 1453 and the last payment made in 1454. The price was 50 gold ducats. (Moschini, "Pittura in Padova", p. 34.

work, which seems commandingly to claim its place as supreme among them all.

By the study of this Ancona we are better able to appreciate the ruined panel of *S. Eufemia*, now in the gallery of Naples, painted at the same date. The saint stands in a deep marble niche, nobly posed as the foregoing, crowned, and robed in rich brocade, the sword in her heart, and at her feet a large yellow lion. Over her head swing heavy garlands of leaves and fruit, and on a *cartellino* below is inscribed OPVS ANDREAE MANTEGNAE MCCCCLIHII.

In these earliest works all that Mantegna has attempted he has accomplished with the utmost science and skill. Correctness of anatomy and perspective, plastic modelling, fine distribution of light and shade, harmonious juxtaposition of colour—all is faultless. Only the figures, full of strong life as they are, as yet are motionless and disconnected. As we proceed we shall see the gradual freeing of the limbs, as the statue descends from its pedestal to take part in the emotions and strivings of humanity.

In the frescoes of the Eremitani, to be placed approximately within the years 1454 and 59, we can trace, as on a slowly opened scroll, the steady evolution of the painter to a broader view of life and art: the struggle between purely scientific interests, cold and calculating, and the artist's feeling for beauty and emotion, culminating in the triumph of the latter. The frescoes are of so much importance in this respect that they cannot be studied too carefully. As I have already said, Mantegna does not seem to have been responsible for the entire scheme of decoration, which



*Alinari photo*

ANCONA OF ST LUKE

PLATE 6

[*Brera, Milan*]





in the vaulting of the apse and roof is of a poor and somewhat trivial character. In the spandrels are painted the four Evangelists, over-decorated, as is usual with the Squarcionesques, with fluttering ribbons, shells and other ornament; on either side are *putti* with spread wings, of a deep red colour; in the apse, four medallions with the four Fathers of the Church, trivial and insignificant in design, but showing much skill in perspective. Above are much injured figures of Apostles, and over the central window, God the Father, grim and large, but without any dignity. Two pilasters, on which are cherubs in brown and blue, divide the apse from the body of the chapel. All this work is of little artistic merit, showing all the poor qualities of the Squarcionesques, crabbed ruggedness, with no real firmness or strength.

The work ascribed to Pizzolo is of a different character.<sup>1</sup> Behind the altar, its lower part hidden by a colossal reredos, is a large *Assumption of the Virgin*, the principal figure so fine and dignified that several critics think the design to be by Mantegna himself. She stands with head and hands uplifted to the frescoed God above, her well-modelled body and limbs accentuated by the clinging drapery. Around her *putti*, full of life and energy, blow pipes and clash cymbals, and below large figures of apostles gaze upward, as in the *Assumption* of Titian executed half-a-century later. Solidly as the Virgin is painted, grand as is the gesture, there is yet a great gulf

<sup>1</sup> The medallions of the Fathers have been ascribed to Pizzolo, as well as the God the Father, but they are so inferior to the *Assumption* that it is impossible they can be by the same hand.

separating the work from that of Mantegna himself, although the painter was undoubtedly influenced by him. The painting lacks the distinction, the decision, and concentration of force, which no genuine work is without. It is but the echo of the master's own voice.

To the same hand I attribute the two upper frescoes of the left wall, which begins the story of *S. James*—"The calling of the two brothers," and "The Saint exorcising demons." In denying any touch of Mantegna's own hand, I feel I stand on sure ground. At first glance composition, types, draperies, posture, all seem his; but a closer study betrays the imitator only. The figures lack balance and solidity; the arrangement of drapery is trivial; the expression of emotion in faces and gestures exaggerated; and the *stateliness* of Mantegna is entirely absent. The resemblance to the work in the *Assumption* is most striking, especially in the two *putti* who have swung themselves aloft in the centre garland.

On the opposite wall the story of *S. Christopher* begins with two frescoes by an unknown assistant, which need not detain us, except to notice that even so poor a painter, in this Paduan school, was an adept in the science of perspective. Below, in the second course are two signed works, the first representing "S. Christopher about to cross the stream," by Bono da Ferrara, the second "The Saint preaching to soldiers," by Ansuino da Forlì. The former is of interest as supporting the theory of Jacopo Bellini's connection with the whole Squarcionesque school, for this figure of the saint leaning on his palm-tree, hand on hip, bears the closest



*Alinari photo*]

[*Eremitani, Paauw*

# THE BAPTISM OF HERMOGENES





resemblance to a drawing of the same subject in the Louvre Sketch-book.

Mantegna's own work is thus reduced to the six frescoes which fill the most important spaces, beginning with *The Baptism of Hermogenes* on the north wall (Plate 7.) The convert kneels at the feet of S James, who pours water on his head, the ceremony being witnessed by six Orientals, one of whom is immersed in a book taken from the abjured heap of magic writings, which lie on the marble pavement. We are at once struck by the predominance of the architectural over the human interest, and by the statue-like immobility of the figures. Rigid they are not, but motionless, standing in fixed postures like men of stone. Their actions are disconnected; that is to say, the limbs have never begun, and could never continue, their movements. The reading figure could never have stooped to pick up the book; Hermogenes could never rise from his knees. Hitherto we have seen Mantegna dealing only with isolated figures, where no action was required, and he has not yet freed himself from the restraint imposed by his education. The one exception is the child, whose keen interest in the proceedings is being checked by an older boy. This little figure, in the white frock and close-fitting cap of a fifteenth century *bambino*, is obviously drawn from life, and its action is simple and natural. We find all through Mantegna's work a sympathetic feeling for children, and it is of interest to note that it is in painting a child he takes his first departure from the statuesque.

In the next fresco, *St. James before Cæsar*,

(Plate 8) the figures take a less subordinate place, and their gestures and attitudes are freer and more spontaneous. The tension is relaxed. We are no longer looking at men of stone, mere accessories to the architecture. The saint stands firmly planted, his dark green mantle drawn toga-like round his solid body. The figure of Cæsar is certainly stiff to a fault, as is also the isolated soldier, in whose stern face, as the bronze mask of S. Andrea bears witness, we see a portrait of Mantegna himself. But the attitude and action of the two guards, and especially of the officer within the marble paling, are easy and free, the latter being of especial interest in our analysis of Mantegna's gradual emancipation. Nothing in this supple figure suggests the statuesque. The posture is relaxed, the mobile features express a real emotion of sympathy, and the whole bears evidence of being a very truthful study from life. The page, who has put his master's helmet on his own small head, from the shadow of which his eyes gleam merrily out, is also treated very naturally. In this fresco we get our first glimpse at Mantegna's landscape, the peculiarities of which, the rocks with numerous splittings, and the cone-like hills crowned with fortresses, are imitated, as we have seen, from Jacopo Bellini. It is of interest to note that the inscription on the arch below the carved medallions is to be found in that master's Sketch-book, now in Paris; the same stone-fragment, possibly part of Squarcione's collection, having doubtless been copied by both.

The frescoes of this upper course are bound together by heavy garlands of leaves and fruits, in which play



*Alinari photo*]

[*Eremitani, Padua*

# ST JAMES BEFORE CÆSAR







*Alinari photo]*

*[Eremitani, Paauw*

# ST JAMES LED TO EXECUTION

PLATE 9



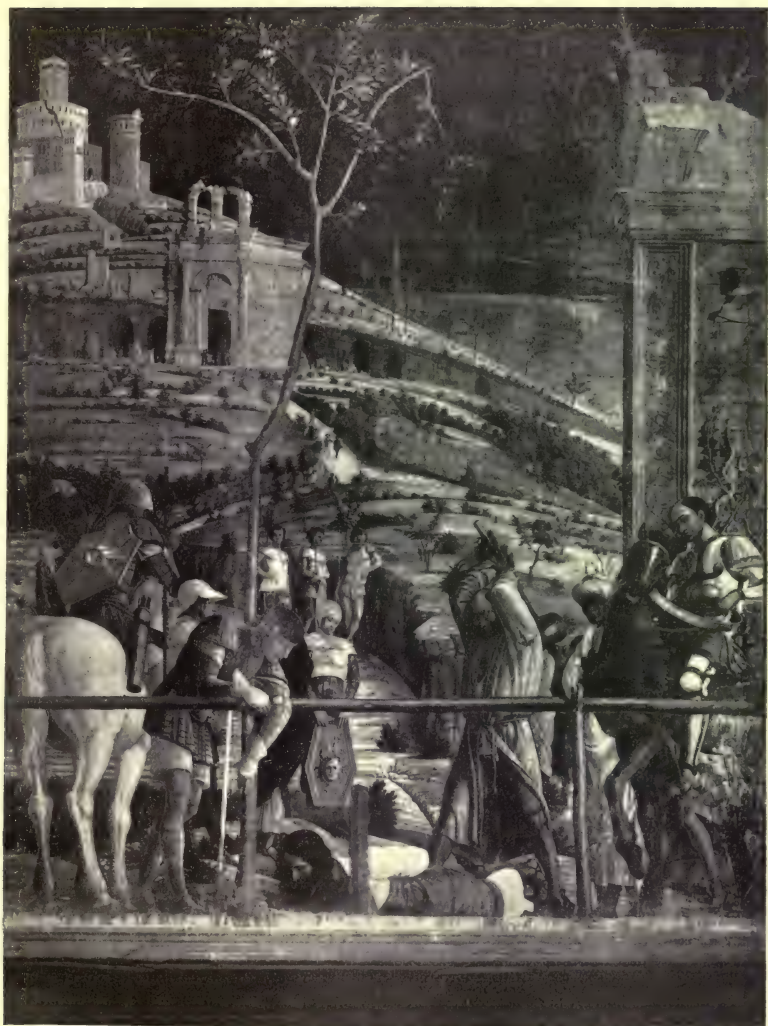
winged *putti*, two of them supporting the Ovetari *stemma* in the centre. This beautiful decoration is by Mantegna's own hand. The children romp with the joyousness of Donatello's babies, and the action of the limbs is free and spontaneous.

In neither of these scenes is the point of view adapted to their actual height from the ground, but is that of the painter himself standing on a level with his work, but in the first of the lower course—*S. James led to Execution* (Plate 9)—Mantegna has inexplicably raised the scene so high above its actual height of six feet or so from the ground, that we have the sensation of the figures being tipped back, and hence of discomfort and insecurity. The vaulting of the arch seems to weigh upon us, the feet of the figures are hidden, and we feel we must strain our necks to see them and the pavement. The struggle between science and art has for the moment resulted in the defeat of the latter, and the fresco must, with all its beauty of detail, be regarded as somewhat of a *tour-de-force*. All the most difficult problems of perspective Mantegna has deliberately assembled and skilfully mastered, but at the sacrifice of harmony and even of accuracy, for the point of view is adapted to at least twice the actual height of the painting from the ground. What it lacks, however, in artistic grace is compensated by beauty of detail and by the marvellous technical skill. Not even Paolo Uccello himself has given greater depth of space by means of converging lines. Notwithstanding the sudden precipitation of the arch, each detail of carving on inside wall and architrave stands out distinctly to the end. The figures are mathemati-

cally worked out, each with its own vanishing point; the crooked street with its irregular buildings leads the eye deeply in; the projection of the centre figure is so skilful that it appears to stand beyond the surface of the wall. All a painter's difficulties are triumphantly vanquished. And with all this preoccupation, and a corresponding neglect of the artistic harmonies and of his theme, the individual figures have much beauty and charm, especially that of the young soldier who presses forward to clear a path for the saint to pass.

This splendid bit of *bravura* was but a momentary lapse—if lapse it can be called—and in the following fresco—*The Martyrdom of the Saint* (Plate 10)—the scene is treated more naturally and with greater freedom than either of the foregoing. The point of vision is now set at the correct height, the composition is well-balanced, and the action of the figures natural and easy. The executioner, indeed, is treated with an almost modern realism, and his action is free and consecutive. The hammer has been raised with a vehemence that has cracked the sleeve of his coat, and will descend, we feel, with a crashing force. The officer to the right, who has reined back his horse to avoid the backward swing, has been evidently studied from life, so supple is the figure, so easy the gesture. There is profound feeling, moreover, in the look of sorrowful compassion with which he watches the martyr. Mantegna's human interest is roused. Henceforth he no longer conceives humanity as isolated figures, cold and unemotional, but as people of flesh and blood, stirred by sensations of sympathy and pity. But with this wider view of art and life his interest in technical





*Alinari photo]*

*[Eremitani, Paaua*

THE MARTYRDOM OF ST JAMES



problems has not in the least abated. Note the magnificent foreshortening of the white horse to the left, reminding one of a medal by Pisanello; also the curiously deceptive effect of the figure leaning over the railing, which seems to be actually detached from the wall and bending forward into the chapel.<sup>1</sup> In witness of the slight consideration bestowed by Mantegna on his theme, the Saint, hitherto painted with fair hair and blunt features, is now represented swarthy and keen-faced as an Arab.

We are helped to a reconstruction of the obliterated parts in the two ruined frescoes on the opposite wall by contemporary copies, now in the possession of Madame André-Jacquemart, which, although poorly executed, are, except in a few minor details, faithful to the originals.<sup>2</sup> We now find Mantegna conceiving his scheme of decoration on a wider scale. The two frescoes, one representing *The Martyrdom of S. Christopher*, the other *The Removal of the Body* (Plates 11 and 12), form one large scene, divided by a painted pilaster, in which he has struck the common vanishing point of both, the two episodes taking place in one large paved courtyard, under a *pergola*, with a Renaissance palace in the centre. The development of vision is apparent from the decorative point of view, the general effect of the wall space to be filled being now

<sup>1</sup> This effect, hardly noticeable in the photograph, is most striking in the fresco itself. The head of this figure is much injured, the plaster having been broken away and the painting badly restored.

<sup>2</sup> Reproduced in M. Paul Mantz's "Mantegna," *Gaz. des. Beaux Arts*, No. 33, N.S., p. 190. These may be the copies mentioned by the Anonymo, p. 74. "El retratto piccolo della Cappella delli Herimitani dell opera del Mantegna fu de man de. . . ."

predominant in Mantegna's scheme. Architecture and costumes are those of his own day. On the extreme left stood the Saint, arms and legs bound with ropes, naked save for the loin-cloth ; but nothing now remains except the merest outline of a shoulder, leg, and foot, and the faintest indication of the hands. Two archers have just shot their arrows, one of which drops harmless to the ground, while the other has rebounded, and struck deep into the eye of the judge, who watches the martyrdom from the window of his palace. The scene is dramatic and animated. The momentary action is exceedingly well rendered, and contrasts strikingly with the immobility of the figures in the first two frescoes opposite. One archer has swung round swiftly at the shriek of the judge, and raises his hand with a gesture of horror. The other, his elbows still pointed from drawing the cord, has also heard the cry, but has not yet had time to turn, both transient actions, and anything but statuesque. Two soldiers, grasping halberds, gaze up with astonishment at the giant whose flesh is so miraculously invulnerable. These, tradition declares to be portraits of Squarcione and of Mantegna himself, but the bronze of S. Andrea proves the latter identification to be incorrect. It is interesting to find in the Paris Sketch-book of Jacopo Bellini the same subject of the martyrdom of S. Christopher composed in precisely the same way.

The martyrdom is accomplished by decapitation, and the next section shows the removal of the corpse, arranged to allow a marvellous bit of foreshortening of the colossal body. The head (now almost obliterated) lay in the foreground, and the huge





*Alinari photo*]

[*Eremitani, Paauw*

THE MARTYRDOM OF ST CHRISTOPHER

PLATE II



carcase is being dragged away by ropes. Right and left, with that mathematical balance which is growing upon Mantegna, as upon all good composers, stands a soldier with a halberd. One, however, is entirely lost, as likewise is the figure of a tiny boy to whom the other bends down. Many of the heads in both sections are portraits, as their strong individual character bears evidence,<sup>1</sup> but identification with the many famous names recorded by Vasari would be vain.

The frescoes are throughout restrained, even severe in colour, giving at the first glance almost the impression of *grisaille*. As we observe the colours in detail, we find them to be chiefly light luminous blue, dull mauve, and orange, and dull green—altogether a rather sombre scheme. In the open air scenes the blue of the sky has flaked away, leaving the dark underpainting exposed, which destroys the values of distance and adds to the gloomy effect. In the architectural parts the colour is most realistic, giving the buildings the illusive appearance of being actual marble and stone.

In glancing back over the whole series two things chiefly strike us. First, the extreme concentration, the earnestness, in every one of these stern and melancholy faces, which is the keynote of Mantegna's own strenuous character. Then the gradual expansion from the severe immobility of pose to freedom and a certain spontaneity. This is the logical development of the artist given free scope for his powers, and needs

<sup>1</sup> Note, for example, the three profiles to the extreme right in the first section.

no other explanation. It is not conceivable that an artist of Mantegna's intellectual calibre, and with his technical equipment, should remain bound to a merely imitative classicism. He extracted from his antique models that stately purity, which gives his work the distinction of a Pheidian statue; but for the mind in touch with his epoch, in sympathy with its passionate human struggle, that was not enough, and the direct appeal to Nature herself followed as a matter of course. The statue, never entirely impersonal, as these earnest faces show, becomes animated, and while retaining an ideal nobility, is inspired with the varied emotions and passions of humanity.





*Alinari photo*]

[*Eremitani, Paaua*

THE REMOVAL OF THE BODY OF ST CHRISTOPHER

PLATE 12



## CHAPTER IV

### MANTUA FRESCOES—1459-1474

**I**N the foregoing chapter we have watched the awakening of Mantegna's interest in personal character, and noticed the first signs of that keen insight, and power of emphasising its essential qualities, which make his portraits among the most impressive in art. One other master only had this power to an equal degree. The portraits of Velazquez have the same faculty of forcing their actual existence upon us, so that we feel before them as though really in the presence of some weighty and commanding personality.

The first portrait which survives is fortunately in good condition, and well illustrates this power of concentrating the very essence of the sitter's character. It is the portrait of Cardinal Lodovico Scarampi, Archbishop of Florence, and later Patriarch of Aquileia, painted in 1459,<sup>1</sup> now in the Berlin Gallery (*see frontispiece*). The powerful head seems cast in bronze rather than painted on a flat surface. The intellectual strength, the energy and arrogance of the man, are stamped deeply on the stern features, and, with profound comprehension and sympathy, Mantegna

<sup>1</sup> For the precise dating of this portrait, we are indebted to Mr Berenson, who has connected it with a visit paid in the summer of 1459 by Scarampi to Padua. See Lorenzo Lotto (1901), p. 42.

has suggested likewise the subtler aspects of a many-sided nature, the lofty aspirations, the tragedy of failure, and the latent nobility. It is the very essence of a soul, strong as some fiery distillation, he has here set down. Better than any historical document does it interpret the character of the ambitious priest.

The excellence of the likeness is attested by comparison with the contemporary medal. There are the same features, animated by the same stern purpose and ambition, but the touch of nobility, and of pathos which makes Mantegna's portrait at once so sympathetic and so terrible, the medallist has not observed.

At about the same time he was occupied in painting the *Altar-piece* for the Protonotary Gregorio Corraro, Abbot of S. Zeno in Verona, which, after many vicissitudes, has been replaced in the church for which it was intended. (Plate 13.) Taken to Paris in 1797 by Napoleon, it was afterwards returned, but without the three *predella* pictures, which still remain in France, one in the Louvre, the two others in the Museum of Tours, copies of them filling the vacant spaces in the fine original frame of blue and gold. In the centre panel, the Virgin is seated in a stately hall, between the pillars of which one sees fleecy clouds (Mantegna's own peculiar fleecy clouds, really like wool) sail across a dark blue sky. The upright child stands on her knee, and over their heads swing the usual heavy garlands of leaves and fruits, which are one of the most precious inheritances of the Renaissance from antiquity. It must be confessed that the face of the Virgin is somewhat insipid, and that she depends less for her dignity on the strength of her own personality than on her gorgeous surround-







*Alinari photo]*

PLATE 13

THE MADONNA



[S. Zeno, Verona

A ENTHRONED





ings. The grandeur of the scene is chiefly derived from the solemn aisle of figures which flank the throne on either side, and which are brought into especial prominence by the colour values, the foremost seeming to stand almost outside the surface of the panel, and leading the eye well in towards the throne of the Virgin, as the pillars of a nave to the altar. On the right, S. John the Baptist (tall and meagre, looking as though carved out of wood by Donatello), SS. Zeno, Lawrence and Benedict; on the left, SS. Peter, Paul, John the Evangelist and Augustine. This style of composition is a favourite one with Jacopo Bellini. In many of his sketches we find this placing of the principal figure or group well back in the middle plane, led up to by rows of stately saints. The colour is rich, with almost Venetian depth, while the flesh tints are for the most part very fair. Here, and in the soft contours and modelling of some of the faces, may be observed a slight resemblance to the work of Giovanni Bellini.<sup>1</sup>

The *predella* pictures are a marvel of delicate painting. They represent *The Crucifixion*, *The Agony in the Garden*, and *The Resurrection*, the two last in the Museum of Tours. In the central panel of *The Crucifixion*, now in the Louvre, the composition is

<sup>1</sup> In the collection at Chatsworth is a pen sketch, attributed to Giovanni Bellini, of the left wing of this altar-piece, which Dr Richter, in support of the theory that Mantegna was much influenced by him at this date, suggests to be the original study from which he worked. It would be difficult to accept that a painter of the wealth of invention, the energy and independence of Mantegna should have cared to copy from another; putting aside the exceedingly characteristic composition, poses, arrangement of draperies, etc. I see in this drawing, whether it be by Bellini or by a follower of either master, merely a sketch from Mantegna's own work.

built up with geometrical precision, the soldiers casting dice on the one side balanced accurately by the group of women on the other, and looming aloft in sinister grandeur the three tall crosses. The unnatural length and attenuation of limb in several of the figures is a mannerism with which we are familiar in the sketch-books of Jacopo Bellini, and which was imitated also by the young Giovanni, and by others who were educated in the Paduan school.<sup>1</sup> Mantegna's tendency is always to give his figures a noble stature, and in the first series of the Eremitani frescoes several of them are somewhat unnaturally tall, but it is curious that so correct an anatomist should even momentarily have allowed himself the exaggeration shown in this painting. In all three panels there is strong feeling for dramatic action, the different emotions of grief, suffering, and dazed amazement being rendered with intense earnestness and vivid realism.<sup>2</sup>

Mantegna repeated with variations, the scene of the Gethsemane, as it seems, in the same year 1459, for Giacomo Marcello, Podestà of Padua. Nowhere do we find stronger evidence than in this picture of the influence of Jacopo Bellini upon his outward style. His drawing of the same subject in the British Museum Sketch book, in general lines of composition, as well as in much of the detail, is identical; the curves of path and stream, the split rocks which give so architectural

<sup>1</sup> Noticeably Cosimo Tura, and Ercole Roberti, his imitator. For striking example of the latter's exaggerated type, see the beautiful little painting *S. John the Baptist*, Berlin Gallery, No. 112c.

<sup>2</sup> We find the emotions of horror and grief expressed by widely parted lips, used so effectively by Mantegna and the young Bellini, over and over again in the drawings of Jacopo.



*Alinari photo*]

[*Accademia, Venice*

ST GEORGE

PLATE 14







*Loury photo*]

[*Vienna Gallery*

ST SEBASTIAN

PLATE 15



an appearance to the landscape, the tall attenuated soldiers in the middle distance. How often in the Sketch books we find the bare tree, on whose branch a cormorant is seated, and the foreground scattered with small pebbles. Even the playing rabbits which offer so strong a contrast to the gloomy scene, are Jacopo's.<sup>1</sup> Giovanni also painted the same scene with much outward similarity,<sup>2</sup> but with complete divergence of aim, showing himself already, in his attention to atmospheric effects and the close relation of his figures to the landscape, the precursor of Giorgione. Mantegna has rendered the scene with a curious mixture of fantasy and realism. The attitudes of the apostles, whose heavy breathing we seem to hear as they lie sunk in slumber, are natural to the point of realism, and contrast oddly with the landscape and architecture of the distant town, which seems some strange land east of the sun and west of the moon, albeit we find perched high up on a column so actual a thing as Donatello's statue of Gattamelata. The panel has the same rich depth of colour as the Verona altar-piece, the bronze robes of Christ, the greenish blue of sky and stream and the warm brown of the rocks blending into a splendid harmony.

From this glow of colour Mantegna departs abruptly in two panels which must be placed at no far distant date—the *S. George* of the Venice Academy and the *S. Sebastian* of Vienna. Mantegna varies more than most painters both in the tone and in the combination of his colours, sometimes choosing a scheme of silvery

<sup>1</sup> See the drawing of S. Jerome reading, Paris Sketch-book.

<sup>2</sup> No. 726 of the National Gallery.

delicacy, at others of Venetian richness, now pale as a building of faint-hued marbles, now gorgeous with the lustre of beaten gold. This seeming instability is no doubt due to the relatively small value he placed on colour as compared with form. Fine colourist though he invariably was, he obtained his effects more by line, and later by the massing of lights and shadows, and his constant use of *grisaille* proves that at times he was glad to be rid of colour altogether. The *S. George* (Plate 14) is painted in pale silvery tones, bright and delicate, the blue-grey of the armour and light tints of the sky and background harmonising well with the buoyancy of the dainty figure. The two saints might stand as symbolic of the Mediæval and Renaissance spirits: the one bound and suffering, his thought fixed on the life for which his tortured body is the pledge; the other radiant with the joy of life and the pride of physical strength, the broken spear alone witnessing to the stress of battle. In the *S. Sebastian* (Plate 15) the playing rabbits are again introduced as in the *Gethsemane*, typifying it may be in both the indifference of Nature to human suffering. On the marble of the ruined arch to which the saint is bound is cut in Greek characters: THE WORK OF ANDREA.

Belonging to the first year of his life in Mantua we may place the tryptych of the Uffizi, almost certainly painted, as we have seen, for the castle chapel. Finished with the delicacy of a miniature, and loaded with detail, Mantegna has yet never lost sight of the composition as a whole, and with all its elaboration of ornament has retained the significance and unity of the scene. Few Virgins can compare with this in





*Alinari photo]*

*[Uffizi, Florence*

THE ADORATION OF THE MAGI

PLATE 16





*Alinari photo]*

*[Uffizi, Florence*

THE CIRCUMCISION





*The Adoration of the Magi* for stately beauty, though somewhat marred by the heavy cherubs around her. (Plate 16.) Beside her the S. Zeno Madonna, seated on her gorgeous throne amid [all the insignia of hieratic pomp, is insignificant. The child is treated with extreme naturalness. Observe what loving care Mantegna has bestowed on the delicate plants and grasses of the foreground, and the beautiful growth of fig which sprouts from the rock above the cave. Again we find a reminiscence of Jacopo Bellini. In the Paris Sketch book is a study of the same scene, where the cavalcade winds round the rocky hills in a manner precisely similar.

The right wing, representing *The Circumcision*, shows Mantegna once more preoccupied with the beauty of architecture. (Plate 17.) Full of interest as are the figures, the eye at first hardly observes them, but is caught up by the soaring line of the pillar to the beautiful curves of the arches above, and remains there fascinated by the life and spring of the lines. But after the first sweeping sensation, as the eye descends to the group at the foot of this tree-like column, the attention is rivetted on the tender charm of the scene. Those who, like Selvatico, can find in Mantegna little but stern severity, can never have studied him in this mood, and yet it is a mood constantly recurring, almost invariable in his representation of children. How sympathetically he has felt the terror of the child, the sorrow of the Virgin, the kindly benevolence of the old priest. Christ has thrown himself round in beseeching appeal to his mother, while the little S. John puts a finger in his

mouth and whimpers with sympathy. And over all the simple scene tower the great wings of the arches, and our eye, having begun with the grand sweep of line, returns to dwell there.

The left wing, representing *The Resurrection*, is less good, dry and *serré* in treatment.<sup>1</sup> The figure of Christ with the surrounding cherubs presses so heavily downwards as to give the sensation of being about to crush the group below. The cloud-borne figures of the Sienese and most of the Umbrians have so little solidity that they seem to sustain themselves, and for the most part lack the sense of downward pressure even when standing on *terra firma*. Mantegna, on the other hand, as becomes his scientific interests, gives always actual weight and substance to the body, and hence is least successful in this kind of representation.

The next surviving painting seems to be *The Death of the Virgin*, now in the Madrid Gallery. (Plate 18.) It is severely and delicately drawn and exquisitely composed. Again, as in the Verona altar-piece, and here with even greater success, the significance of the theme is enhanced by the solemn row of saints on either side, which leads the eye directly in, where stretched out on the bier lies the aged Virgin. The centre foreground is empty, the solemn rites take place in the middle plane, set deeply within the picture. The value of this arrangement is that we feel ourselves actually *within* the enclosed space, participants in the scene, not, as is the case where the interest is concentrated in the foreground, mere spectators, arrested, so to

<sup>1</sup> Again we find a similar composition in Jacopo Bellini's drawing of the same subject in the Paris Sketch-book.



*Menet photo*]

[*Prado Gallery, Madrid*

THE DEATH OF THE VIRGIN





speak, on the threshold. Here we take our stand beside the bier, while the eye is carried out still farther, beyond the lagoon to the opposite shore. Mantegna's success in the rendering of depth of space is one of his greatest achievements, and he shares this power of transporting the spectator actually within his scenes with Raffaello and Giorgione. The view of the lake, formerly supposed to be a Venetian lagoon, can be identified with the surrounding waters of the Castello of Mantua, over which runs the Ponte S. Giorgio. The panel seems to have been sold by Duke Vicenzio to Charles I., and in the catalogue of his collection is described as follows—"A Mantua piece" (this in the king's own hand) "No. 27. A little piece of Andrea Montania (*sic*) being the dying of our lady, the apostle's standing about with white candles lighted in their hands; and in the landskip where the town of Mantua is painted, is the waterlake, where a bridge is over the said water towards the town. In a little ebony wooden frame."<sup>1</sup> It was bought by the Spanish ambassador at the sale of the king's effects after his death.

From the foregoing work, fine as a missal-painting, we next come to the grand frescoes of the Camera degli Sposi, probably begun some ten years after Mantegna's arrival in Mantua. Much work of the interval has, as we have seen, been lost by the destruction of the palaces of Goito and Cavriana, or we should have been gradually prepared for this astonishing masterpiece of decoration and portraiture which bursts upon us in its full-blown glory.

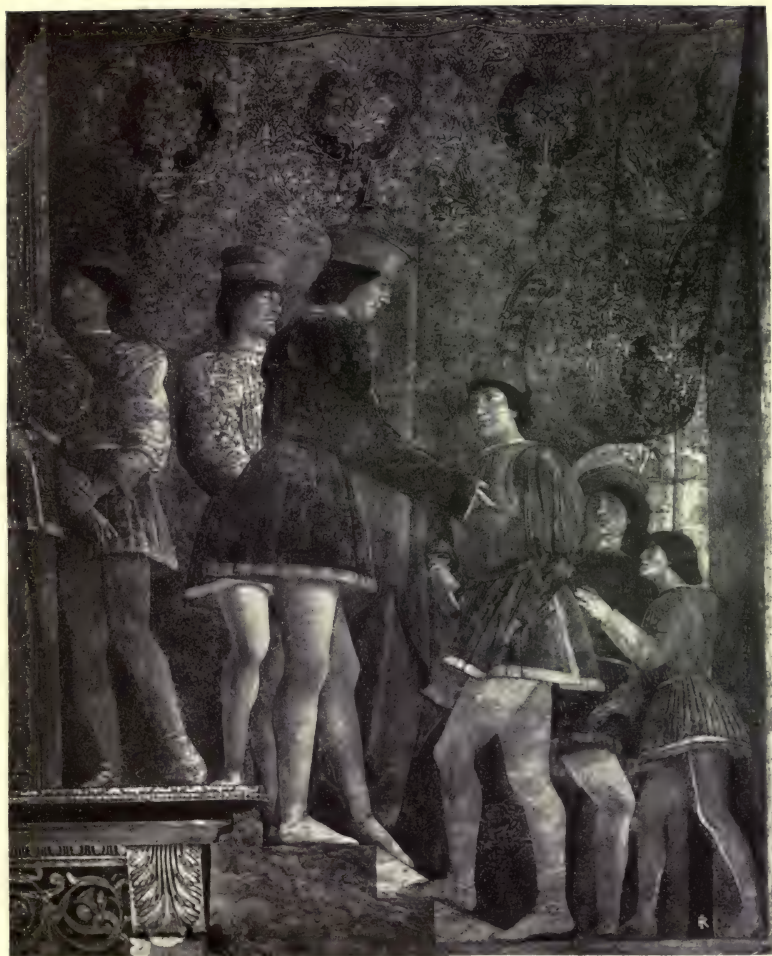
<sup>1</sup> For this quotation I am indebted to the late M. Yriarte's work on Mantegna, Paris, 1901.

The general scheme is of a room hung with curtains of gold brocade, whose heavy folds remain unlifted save on the best lighted walls, where they are drawn aside, and show, as on a stage, stately ceremonials of the Mantuan court. Taking the paintings in detail, we begin with the principal group, generally known as *The Reception of an Ambassador*. (Plates 4 and 19.) The subject of the scene has been variously interpreted. Selvatico supposed that it commemorated the return of the eldest son, Federigo, from Naples, whither in 1460, he had fled to avoid a marriage with the Princess Margaret of Bavaria, and that his is the figure mounting the steps, anxiously watched by the neglected bride-elect. But, apart from the extreme improbability that so painful an episode would have been chosen as a theme for domestic decoration, the hypothesis is fully disproved by comparison with contemporary medals. From that of Talpa we see that it is, on the contrary, Federigo, who, with outstretched hand, goes forward to greet the person entering, and we may with a fair show of reason adopt M. Yriarte's assumption that the theme is the betrothal of the Marquis' second daughter, Barbara, with the Duke of Wurtemberg, which took place about this time,<sup>1</sup> that the incoming personage is the envoy, and that the expectant lady is no other than the Princess Barbara herself.<sup>2</sup>

The following portraits we can identify: The Marquis Lodovico himself, now nearly sixty years old, clad in rich crimson, who turns stiffly to his

<sup>1</sup> Her marriage took place in 1474.

<sup>2</sup> See M. Yriarte's article, "Les Gonzagues dans les fresques de Mantegna" ("Gaz. des Beaux Arts"), vol. xii.



*Anderson photo]*

*[Castello, Mantua*

FEDERIGO GONZAGA RECEIVING AN AMBASSADOR

PLATE 19





secretary (probably Marsilio Andreasi) with a last word before the conference. His wife, Barbara of Brandenburg, celebrated for her wisdom and prudence, watches them with interest and some anxiety. Behind her, her sons, the blonde Gianfrancesco, Lord of Sabbionetta, and the Cardinal Francesco, in rich secular costume of gold and crimson, and by her side the boy-Protonotary Lodovico.<sup>1</sup> Although not confirmed by medals, we may assume the child at her mother's knee holding an apple to be the youngest daughter, Paola, then fourteen years old, and the youth in green and gold brocade who stands against the pillar the fourth son, Rodolfo. The eldest, Federigo, has gone forward to receive the envoy, whom his sister Barbara watches anxiously as he draws aside the heavy gold hangings and mounts the steps of the terrace. We have thus the whole family of Lodovico then living represented, with the exception of the eldest daughter, Susanna, who, crippled and sick, was at this time the inmate of a convent.<sup>2</sup>

I have already spoken of the variety of character portrayed, the grip on each individual character; a variety harmonised by the dominant quality they all possess in common, their stately bearing and gravity, by right of which even the dwarf in her arrogant

<sup>1</sup> The portraits of the Marquis and Protonotary can be identified from the medals of Melioli; of Gianfrancesco by that of l'Antico; of the Cardinal by Sperandio; of Federigo by Talpa.

<sup>2</sup> I do not agree with M. Yriarte in his suggestion that the child with the apple may represent Susanna, so posed in order to hide her deformed person. The travesty would be too repulsive, and, moreover, the age of the youngest daughter, Paola, perfectly corresponds to this figure.

egoism receives our homage. Nothing petty or insignificant enters into Mantegna's conception of humanity.

The fresco is little more than a ruin, irreparably damaged through neglect and restoration. This wall has suffered less than the other, the restoration being more judicious; but even here much of the drawing, especially in the lower part, has been lost. I need hardly point out that Mantegna, the scientific anatomist and exquisite draughtsman, is not responsible for the shapeless legs of some of the figures, nor for the clumsy perspective in those of the ascending envoy.

Ruined as it is, something of the old magnificence of colour still remains, colour so much deeper, more resplendent than in the Paduan frescoes. Once it was a blaze of gold, of deep crimson and lustrous green, conceived on a scale of splendour in keeping with the brilliance of the Mantuan court.

On the other wall is an outdoor scene set in a beautiful landscape. (Plate 20.) The Marquis, in short riding-coat, and wearing huge spurs, has dismounted from his horse, and goes forward to meet his son on his return from Rome with the honour of the Cardinal's hat. The composition brings into special prominence those of the family who were dedicated to the church. The Cardinal Francesco, the young Protonotary Lodovico,<sup>1</sup> and their little nephew, Sigismondo, afterwards Bishop of Mantua, all holding hands, form the central

<sup>1</sup> In the Gallery of Naples is a ruined portrait attributed to Giovanni Bellini, which, even in its ruined state, retains the gravity and concentration peculiar to Mantegna's work. It seems undoubtedly to be a portrait of this same Lodovico, as a comparison with these frescoes will show.



*Anderson photo]*

*[Castello, Mantua*

MEETING OF LODOVICO GONZAGA WITH CARDINAL FRANCESCO

PLATE 20





group. On the right stands Federigo, in stiff gold-plaited mantle; the likeness to the medal by Talpa, struck after his accession to the marquise, being so exact as to suggest that he copied this portrait. Of special interest is the figure of the little Gianfrancesco, his eldest son, Mantegna's future prince, at this time about seven years of age. Here are the same strange features, protruding brow, and bush of dark hair we shall see again, little changed, in the altar-piece painted twenty years later. A tufted tree, such as Jacopo Bellini so often drew, shoots up against the deep blue sky, and the background shows a walled city, which bears a certain resemblance to Rome, where we can discover ruins not unlike the Colosseum, the Tabularium and the Pyramid of Cestius.

In the first division of the wall is the Marquis' charger, a noble equine portrait, standing among a group of fierce-looking boarhounds, against a grove of orange trees, and behind stretches out one of Mantegna's most beautiful and imaginative landscapes. In the middle space, cut through by the door, stand huntsmen holding dogs, and overhead a group of winged *putti* support the tablet on which the following dedication is inscribed:

ILL LODOVICO II M M  
PRINCIPI OPTIMO AC  
FIDE INVICTISSIMO  
ET ILL BARBARÆ EJUS  
CONIVGI MVLIERVM GLOR  
INCOMPARABILE  
SVVS ANDREAS MANTINIA  
PATAVVS OPVS HOC TENVE

AD EORV̄ DECVS ABSOLVIT

ANNO MCCCCLXXIIII

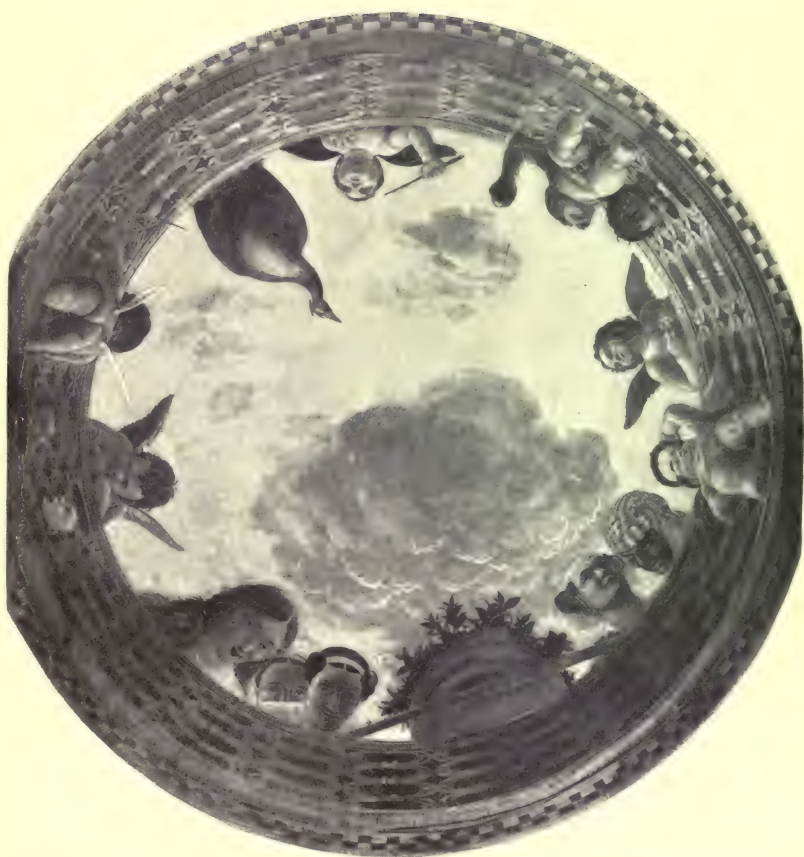
The *putti* have butterflies', or jays', wings painted with a naturalist's accuracy of observation. In the curves of the arches are the different *stemme* of the family, surrounded by garlands of fruit and foliage, and crisp, fluttering ribbons, each a masterpiece of decorative design.

This wall has suffered terribly. Damp has bleached the colours, and crumbled away the plaster; and, above all, the repainting has been disastrous. Few of the faces have not been ruined; those especially of the Cardinal and Protonotary having lost nearly all character, while the heads of the grooms in the centre space are entirely modern, being painted on new plaster.

Over the door on the next wall is an almost obliterated fresco: six *putti* supporting a great shield emblazoned with the Gonzaga arms, now reduced to the merest outline. The rest of the walls were painted with the heavy gold brocade curtain, but are in a state of complete ruin.

The roof decoration is of unrivalled beauty. It is entirely in *grisaille* and gold, except the centre which is painted in most delusive imitation of an opening, through which we look up to the brilliant blue sky. (Plate 21.) Round it runs a parapet in marvellous perspective, and over this lean, and look laughingly down into the room, a group of women, among them a negress; portraits, probably, of some of the favourites of the court *personale*.

Up the parapet clamber foreshortened *putti*, in all kinds of frolic. Two have stuck their heads through



*Anderson photo*]

[*Castello, Mantua*

CEILING FRESCO





the openings, and cannot withdraw them. They are howling dismally, while a third, holding up an admonishing finger, expounds to them their folly. One threatens with a rod a gorgeous-breasted peacock, and yet another little hand emerges from a hole just under the bird with a like intent. One crowns his head with a garland, another gazes sentimentally upwards, in the attitude of Raffaelle's *putto* in the Sistine Madonna. Mantegna, always full of sympathy for childhood, has revealed himself in a charming mood of genial gaiety. He is here, in spirit as in decorative feeling, the forerunner of Correggio.

The fresco is much and badly repainted; the three heads near the jar, and the jar itself, being entirely new. The child who seems the prototype of Raffaelle's *putto* appears to have been restored as early as 1506.<sup>1</sup> Round the central opening is a superb garland of heavy fruits and foliage, while the rest of the ceiling is in *grisaille* and gold, so perfectly imitating delicate stucco moulding that it is difficult to realise the surface is actually flat. In each of the four compartments formed by the Gothic vaulting are set two medallions, each with a head of a Cæsar, surrounded by massive garlands borne on the shoulders of naked *putti*. In the spandrels are scenes from the lives of Orpheus and Hercules, some of great beauty, especially the groups of Orpheus charming ladies and beasts by his music, and Hercules slaying Antæus and the Hydra. So fine and classic in feeling are they that it would be difficult to believe they are not by Mantegna's own hand, did we not know how closely one at least of his sons

<sup>1</sup> See Crowe and Cavalcaselle for a list of the restorations.

followed in his footsteps. Doubtless entirely designed by himself, we must attribute the greater part of this ceiling work to Lodovico and Francesco, both of whom were probably his assistants.

It will be observed that Mantegna has throughout massed his shadows with reference to the lighting of the room, the high lights striking as though from the windows, while the figures in the centre of the roof are painted as though the aperture were real, and they lighted by the sky above. In blending and incorporating his design with the existing architecture, in obtaining effects from co-operation with its beautiful proportions, Mantegna has shown consummate skill. Not only is each space well filled in itself, but the effect of the whole is never lost sight of, the shape and even the existing ornament (such as the mantelshef) are worked into the scheme. The *Camera degli Sposi* is one of the most perfect examples of domestic decoration in existence. Nothing could well be more beautiful and stately than this chamber must have looked, when furnished with the rich velvets and brocades, and dark woods of the day, with the gorgeous colour and blaze of gold on its walls, and overhead the ivory and gold of the ceiling, not pressing upon the eyes but guiding them up to the clear blue sky of the central opening.

Seated in the rush-bottomed chair, amid the dust and cobwebs of to-day, the frescoed walls so play on the imagination that the past reconstructs itself without effort, and we are back among these grave lords, hearing the rustle of their gold brocade and the murmur of their voices. I know no paintings which

to a like extent have this power of calling up the actual presence of the figures portrayed; so that it is difficult to realise that these princes with whose life the atmosphere is vibrating have been dead four hundred years, their castles demolished, their very name extinct.

And, such is the power of genius, as long as any fragment of Mantegna's painting exists, so long will these Gonzaga lords continue to exercise the strange impressive fascination by which, while their bodies have long ago crumbled to dust, they still have power to rule in their old territory.

## CHAPTER V

### THE TRIUMPH OF CÆSAR—1474-1492

WITH all Mantegna's expanded vision, he still retained his love of exquisite finish, and at a time not far distant from the completion of the Mantua frescoes, must have painted two panels which perfectly combine grandeur of *ensemble* with a miniature-like delicacy of detail—*The Madonna of the Quarries*, of the Uffizi, and *The Christ Upheld by Angels*, of the Copenhagen Museum. These are generally considered to belong to the period of the Roman frescoes, that is to say of 1488, a dating for which Vasari is responsible;<sup>1</sup> but, putting aside the small likelihood that the exactions of the Pope, the impatience of the Marquis for his return to Mantua, and the magnitude of the work on which he was engaged in the Belvedere Chapel, would have allowed him time to execute them during that time, the style of the paintings themselves points to at least a decade earlier.

At the time of the Roman visit he was already far advanced with the *Triumph of Cæsar*, and had abandoned, as we shall see, that minute attention to background detail, which in these panels is painted with so much care. These, and a third whose date is more or less determined by facts—the *S. Sebastian*, of Aigueperse, are the last works in which the background

<sup>1</sup> Vasari, iii., 402.





*Alinari photo*]

[*Uffizi, Florence*

THE MADONNA OF THE QUARRIES



is so microscopically finished. The ever-growing tendency of Mantegna was to a broader conception of his theme and a corresponding largeness of treatment, a subordination of all minor motives to the principal figures. With this he adopted the use of canvas in preference to panel, as being more suitable to a freedom of brushwork, and it will be noticed that after this period — presumably somewhere between 1481 and 1488, he concentrates his attention almost entirely on the principal figures, and bestows less and less on details of background, often omitting them altogether.

In the little panel of the Uffizi (Plate 22) Mantegna is at his best in the combination of grand effect and attention to detail. Notwithstanding its actual dimensions of a few inches we are impressed by a sense of largeness and spaciousness. The Virgin, seated on the bare ground, with the rugged rock behind her, and the ordinary work-a-day life going on around, is one of his stateliest, most regal figures. The landscape is treated with a truth and science which make it seem as convincingly real as a view through a window. We seem able to enter into it, to follow the winding path, and, pausing where the labourers stack their corn, to be able to look back at the grand motionless figure in its deep blue mantle. We seem to know the other side of the brown, split rock as accurately as its quarried face, and the exact distance to be traversed between it and the little walled town. The panel in Vasari's day was in possession of Francesco dei Medici. It is in a state of perfect preservation, which allows us fully to appreciate the beauty of the figures and the exquisite delicacy of the colour.

The *Christ Upheld by Angels*, of Copenhagen, is of the same time and is composed with the same regard for grandeur in the central group, and the same feeling for landscape, which is, in some of its details, a repetition of the foregoing, and has the same power of attracting us into itself. The solemnity of the effect is somewhat marred by the exaggerated expression of the faces, but this is compensated by the nobility of the composition, as the kneeling angels support the body of Christ, their intersected wings making a wonderful pattern, clear-cut against the sky.

It has seemed to me in studying these backgrounds, as though Mantegna had some symbolic meaning in these quarries, from which pillars, sarcophagi and statues are being hewn—some suggestion of the work that had taken place, the revival of antiquity in connection with the Christian faith.

The last panel where the same minute attention is given to the background is the *S. Sebastian*, of Aigueperse, Puy-de-Dôme—a more restrained and realistic study of suffering. In general composition very like the early Vienna picture, the conception of the saint himself is widely different—more human and sincere. This is no smooth-faced, inspired youth, with delicate limbs, pierced yet untouched by pain, but a strong man, on whom suffering has left its mark in furrowed cheek and pain-marred features. It is a fine study of the nude. The athletic figure is superbly constructed and modelled, the muscles indicated rather than insisted on; and yet not Signorelli nor Michelangelo has better given the sense of sinewy strength and hard muscle.





*Hansstaengl photo*

[*Dresden Gallery*]

THE HOLY FAMILY



Now, how did this splendid example of Mantegna's work find its way to a neglected, almost unknown, French village? The conjecture of M. Paul Mantz is most probably correct, and confirms the evidence of the work itself as to the dating. Aigueperse was a fief of Gilbert de Bourbon, Comte de Montpensier, whose castle was in the neighbourhood, and by whose family the church in which the picture stands was founded. In 1481 he was married to Clara Gonzaga, sister of the Marquis Francesco, and it is probable that the picture was included in her dowry, and taken by her to her Auvergne home.<sup>1</sup>

This is the last time, except in the more modernly-treated allegories of the Louvre, that Mantegna dwells on distant background, where little incidents are depicted with the care of a miniaturist, each tree and plant clearly to be discerned. From henceforth he concentrates his attention altogether on the main theme, with a breadth of technique almost Venetian, and in addition a growing buoyancy and freedom of outlook in his figures. These qualities are well illustrated by a group of paintings probably executed not long before the Roman visit, including the *Madonnas* of the Brera, of Turin, and of Dresden, and the so-called *Hortus Inclusus* of Dr Mond.

Of this group the earliest seems to be the *Madonna* of the Brera; a picture which has undergone many

<sup>1</sup> See M. Mantz' article "Une Tournée en Auvergne," containing a fine reproduction of the picture. "Gaz. des Beaux Arts," N.S. xxxiv., p. 376. The picture was exhibited in 1863 at Clermont-Ferrand, and thus described in the catalogue "S. Sebastian: Tableau peint en détrempe *provenant de la Maison de Bourbon, attribué à Mantegna*"; which confirms his suggestion.

vicissitudes, having been, till quite recently, over-painted without any regard to the original lines, so that it had completely lost its Mantegnesque character, and was considered, while in the church of Santa Maria Maggiore in Venice, as the work of some Bellinesque disciple. On the removal of the repaint its authorship was clearly discernible, and it was at once assumed to be the picture mentioned by Vasari, as being in his day in the Badia of Fiesole, to the description of which it corresponds exactly: "A picture in which is our Lady, half-length, with the child *in collo*, and some heads of angels who sing, painted with admirable grace."<sup>1</sup> It is probable that this is the painting seen by Vasari, but it cannot be placed, as he asserts, in the period assigned to the Verona visit, that is to say before the departure for Mantua; its freedom of technique, broader modelling and simpler disposition of draperies, as well as the types of face, belonging to a later date. The buoyant and intrepid look with which this child confronts us is new, and, as I have said, belongs specially to his paintings of this time; the expression, probably, of a certain exuberance in the painter's own spirit in these, the most prosperous, years of his life.

We will turn to the *Holy Family* of the Dresden Gallery (Plate 23), the first of the canvas paintings which we have to consider—a picture in excellent preservation—in order that by studying these new types uninjured, we may have an easier task in reconstructing the more ruined work. Here we have this new buoyancy developed to the utmost. With what a noble

<sup>1</sup> Vasari, iii., 394.





*Dixon photo*]

[*Collection of Dr Mond*

"HORTUS INCLUSUS"



air, with what fearless freedom, these people face the world. Childhood, maturity, and old age alike bold and masterful—it is the Venetian spirit of the sixteenth century that Mantegna here foreshadows. The Virgin is the noblest type he has yet given us; no longer decked with jewels and gorgeous robes, but a goddess by right of her stately beauty and strength. The Christ is the embodiment of a free and fearless spirit. Joseph looks straight before him with the impersonal serenity of a figure of Pier dei Franceschi. A corresponding freedom of technique will be noticed—the easy modelling, the broad massing of light and shadow, the grand simplicity of the drapery over the solid limbs. The rougher surface of the canvas lends itself to a broader sweep of brush.

Of almost equal beauty is Dr Mond's *Hortus Inclusus* (Plate 24), where the Christ-child looks out with the imperial pride of a young Cæsar, born to the purple, a sceptre of olive in one hand, a crystal globe in the other. At his feet, as they rest on the ledge of violet marble, is bent the beautiful profile of the Virgin, kneeling in adoration. These two well-preserved canvases rank among the finest easel pictures of Mantegna's middle period.

Once, perhaps, equally fine, but now, alas! a complete wreck, only to be appreciated by acquaintance with the foregoing, is the *Madonna and Saints* of the Turin Gallery. (Plate 25.) The panel has cracked in several places, and the repainting has been most unskilful, the restorer even going so far as to add drapery to the body of the child. Nothing, however, has been able to destroy the beauty of the Virgin, evidently

painted from the same model as the Dresden canvas. The features of S. Scolastica also repeat those of S. Elizabeth, and many other similarities between the two pictures will be noticed, where the injuries allow the original work to appear; for example, in the broad arrangement of the draperies, so different at this period to the stiffer folds of the Paduan days.

In its completely over-painted state, but little can be said of the last picture of the group—the *Holy Family* of the Verona Gallery. Save the general lines of composition nothing remains of the original work, and the very types of face have changed under the clumsy "restoration." Were it possible for the thick daubing to be removed, however, as was done in the case of the Brera panel, it is probable that a work would emerge in every way as fine as the foregoing, for it belongs to Mantegna's grandest period.

It will be noticed throughout this group how completely Mantegna has abandoned the Squarcione-sque detail and excess of ornament. The elaborate thrones, the heavy haloes, the intricate carvings of his early work, have disappeared, and the figures gain thereby an ampler significance.

As we have seen, the work of two entire years has been lost by the destruction of the Belvedere Chapel, and we must pass on to the series of paintings, which in some respects touches the highest point of Mantegna's development—*The Triumph of Julius Cæsar*—the wreckage of which is to be seen at Hampton Court. Of this splendid work little remains but the composition, hardly an inch of the nine canvases being free from the thick paint of the "restorer."





*Anderson photo*]

THE MADONNA AND SAINTS

[*Turin Gallery*

PLATE 25



Already well advanced in 1486,<sup>1</sup> the painting was interrupted by the commission of the Pope, but continued and completed immediately after Mantegna's return in 1491. It seems to have been in every respect a labour of love, to which he dedicated all his vast knowledge: and to the classical student the work is still an inexhaustible mine of wealth in details of the habits, costumes and ornaments of ancient Rome.

Destined, as it would seem, for the palace of the Marquis Francesco, near the Porta Pusterla, we hear later of six of the canvases forming the background to the stage in the Castello theatre, during the representation of a play of Terence.<sup>2</sup> At the beginning of the seventeenth century they had a place in the Palazzo, where they were seen and one of them copied by Rubens.<sup>3</sup> Their subsequent history is a tragedy. Sold to Charles I. before the sack of Mantua, they were after his death reserved by Cromwell for himself, and at the Restoration were still at Hampton Court, where they remained intact till their "restoration" was ordered by William III. Louis Laguerre thereupon began his work of destruction,

<sup>1</sup> In a letter, of 1486, Silvestro Calandra wrote to the marquis: "To-day the illustrious Lord Duke (Guidobaldo di Montefeltro, Duke of Urbino) took boat for a little turn on the lake . . . he disembarked at the gate of the town to go and see the Triumphs of Cæsar, which Mantegna is in course of painting: from them he received a keen pleasure, and returned to the castle by the covered way." (See M. Yriarte's "Mantegna," Paris, 1901.)

<sup>2</sup> See the letter, from Sigismondo Cantelmo to the Duke of Ferrara, of 1501, where, in describing the theatre, he writes: "One of the sides was ornamented with six pictures of Cæsar's Triumph by the hand of the excellent Mantengha." (Campori, "Lett. Art Ined.," 3 and 4.)

<sup>3</sup> This copy is now in the National Gallery, No. 278.

and the paintings became in his hands the incongruous mixture of noble form and leering, vacuous feature we see to-day—not a face that is not coarse or insipid, not a particle of the principal figures that is not daubed heavily over, and only a few inches here and there of subordinate detail have escaped his ruthless brush. Crowe and Cavalcaselle give a pathetic list of the few fragments left intact—here part of a buskin, there a sleeve, a scabbard, a breastplate, a chariot wheel. The canvases are the most melancholy example of so-called restoration in the history of art. The gallery in which they are now hung is, moreover, as ill-suited as possible for its purpose; its narrowness precluding any view of the procession as a whole, while the reflection from the large windows opposite prevents even a piecemeal study, except obliquely. But we must make the best of such fragmentary glimpses as we are able to obtain.

The procession begins with a blast of trumpets, preceding the emblems of Rome's majesty, among them large standards on which are represented the conquered cities before and after the war. Of this nothing but the composition shows Mantegna's hand, and a few details, such as the gold armour of the Ethiopian, and the yellow drapery of the trumpeter. The second canvas shows the gods of the vanquished country borne on chariots—a colossal statue of Jupiter, a bust of Cybele. (This last retains something of Mantegna's own work. It is evidently copied from an antique in his own collection, for it figures again later in the Scipio.) Battering-rams and war instruments of all kinds follow; a model of a temple, tablets and torches; and in the





[*Hampton Court Gallery*]

PROCESSION OF TROPHY BEARERS



next picture, a confused mass of trophies of arms, drawn by small oxen, and guarded by a blonde youth armed with a pike. (Plate 26.) Behind him young priests bear the sacred treasure of the temples—huge urns, vessels of gold and silver, agate amphoræ and tiny statues of the gods. This trophy is continued through the fourth canvas, in the background of which rises one of the hills of Rome. And now, with another blast of trumpets, the sacrificial beasts and sacred fires draw near: first, white oxen, heavy garlands of bay round their necks, led by beautiful youths. For one of these Laguerre has had some respect, and, though heavily retouched, has left at least Mantegna's type of face, and the crisp curls reminding us of the Evangelist in the S. Zeno altarpiece. Next come the elephants, their huge ears barbarically threaded with bells, richly caparisoned and hung with strings of jewels, bearing on their heads great baskets of fruits, and on their broad backs the sacred fires tended by young acolytes. The hill in the background slopes rapidly down, and the procession passes a column with an equestrian statue, and a viaduct, over whose walls ladies lean to view the show.<sup>1</sup> The spoils of the royal house sweep by: massive plate of gold and silver, and the armour and weapons of the slain princes; jewelled crowns and plumed helmets, huge breast-plates, whose size and weight, by testifying to the might of the vanquished, add to the triumph of the conqueror—an old man fairly sinks to the ground, and

<sup>1</sup> Almost effaced. The small Vienna copies, done as an aid to the woodcuts by Andreassi, at the end of the sixteenth century, help to a reconstruction.

a muscular warrior staggers heavily along beneath the burden.

Unfortunately Laguerre's zeal increases with the growing interest of the procession, and as it approaches its climax the canvases are completely disfigured. Of the procession of the prisoners (sometimes called "The Senators") nothing but the composition remains of Mantegna's work. (Plate 27.) In this canvas he had concentrated the human interest of the scene; but we must look through the coarse paint, and forget the blurred and meaningless features, if we would reconstruct in our imagination the original nobility. Sad, but stately and haughty, they pass by—trophies of the conqueror—women and children and the men of peace (the warriors, as Goethe eloquently points out, have all died fighting).<sup>1</sup> They are followed by the jesters and comic singers, who gibe them with insolent words. One senator, distinguished by his diadem and great jewelled armlet, turns with fierce wrath at some scurrilous jest of the following lyrist. (We trace the emotions by the gesture only, for the face is quite void of expression.) Behind come more women; one, with a swathed infant in her arms, stoops to encourage a tiny boy, who has hurt his foot, and holding it up, entreats pathetically to be carried. A fool and a dwarf insult the noble prisoners, and behind a young soldier bears aloft the helmet of Cæsar, on which the Roman Eagle spreads his wings.

In the next division are the musicians appointed to insult the vanquished, half dancing to their lyres,

<sup>1</sup> See Goethe's description of the painting ("Fernerer über Kunst"), written in 1820 and 1822.





[*Hampton Court Gallery*]

PROCESSION OF PRISONERS

PLATE 27



a negro with a trumpet, a boy with a tambourine, and behind them great branches of withered leaves and fruits, to which birds are tied—the fruits and birds of the captured country. And now, the climax approaches—the chariot of Cæsar himself, heralded by all the emblems and insignia of Rome—banners and busts, the suckling wolf, and lastly the imperial eagle, borne by a richly-armed soldier, who turns to do obeisance to the conqueror, Julius, who, clad in gold robes, is seated quietly and proudly in his gorgeous chariot. In the background rises a triumph-arch surmounted by statues. In and out between the chariot wheels and the horses' hoofs play little naked children bearing olive boughs, and behind Cæsar a youth, masqued as Victory, with white wings, holds the bay-crown over his head, while another swings before him his device *Veni, Vidi, Vici*. And so the procession closes.

An engraving (perhaps designed, though not executed by Mantegna, Bartsch, 11) is by many critics supposed to be a study for a tenth canvas, and to take its place as a group of philosophers and students behind the chariot. To me its background alone precludes the acceptance of this theory. The line of hills and buildings of the background has throughout the procession been continuous, and has culminated in the triumph-arch behind Cæsar. This engraving begins with the half of a building having no relation with the last canvas. It seems to me to be rather from a study or varied copy of the group of prisoners, with which in general idea it has much in common.

What has perished of the grandeur of these paintings, can only be guessed. What remains, however, is

sufficient to rank the work as one of the most precious possessions of our country—the movement, the life, the growing interest of the composition, which, like the procession of the Parthenon frieze, now halting, now rhythmically moving, takes its stately way before our eyes. To the accuracy of detail, the scholarly reconstruction of a forgotten ceremonial, the united acclamation of all students of Roman civilisation testifies. The fidelity to every detail of costume, armour, implements and weapons, makes the painting an inexhaustible treasury of archæological knowledge. But all this wealth of detail never overburdens or detracts from the movement or the interest, and the attention is centred undisturbed on the chief pausing points as they gradually lead up to the climax in the figure of Cæsar, simple, silent, and majestic, amid all the noise of trumpets, of singing, and of jingling bells. It is a ruin, but a ruin like those of the Rome it represents, which speaks the more eloquently that no deliberate damage has been able to efface its grandeur.





*Alinari photo]*

*[Poldi Pezzoli Gallery, Milan*

THE MADONNA AND CHILD



## CHAPTER VI

### LATER WORKS

IF the more epic works of this time have suffered so severely, fortunately some of the smaller paintings are fairly well preserved. To the same post-Roman period belong three small canvases, which, though catalogued as drawings, have every right to a place among the paintings, being finished works in Mantegna's usual medium of varnish-glazed tempera. These are *The Judgment of Solomon*, of the Louvre, the *Mutius Scævola*, of Munich, and the *Judith*, formerly belonging to Colonel Malcolm, now in the Dublin Gallery. They are no mere studies, but finished paintings, and very characteristic of this time—shortly after the visit to Rome—when Mantegna was deeply impregnated with the sculpture of its bas-reliefs. The latter deals with a theme treated twice by Mantegna with grandeur and dignity—the slaying of Holofernes. Less beautiful than the *Judith* of the Uffizi (to be considered later), it yet takes its place among his noblest and most classic works, and this woman with her stern, yet tender face, and sacrificial mien, might stand as a personification of Nemesis. Many times is this subject treated by his disciples, always with the dignity derived from these originals, sometimes indeed so grandly that only by slight technical differences, and the absence of the

Master's own peculiar distinction, can they be distinguished from his work. <sup>1</sup>

*The Judgment of Solomon* and the *Scævola* are less carefully painted, but with great breadth and vigour. The latter must certainly be the picture seen by the Anonymo in the house of Messer Francesco Zio, in Venice, and thus described by him: "The small picture of Mutius Scævola, burning his own arm, imitating bronze, was by the hand of Andrea Mantegna." <sup>2</sup>

It is to be regretted that so rich and representative a gallery as that of Munich, with no example of the master on its walls, should shut away in a portfolio a genuine painting which would do honour to any collection. The Louvre, with its other splendid examples of his work, can better afford to leave its canvas, *The Judgment of Solomon* among the drawings, more especially as there it is exposed to view in a good light.

Less severely classic is a trio of Madonnas, to be placed towards the close of the century, of special interest and charm for the tender and realistic treatment of the child, painted from the same infant in all three. These are the Madonnas of the Poldi-Pezzoli and Bergamo Galleries, and of Herr James Simon's collection in Berlin. So natural indeed is the treatment, so sympathetic the feeling, that one is tempted to suspect the *bambino* to be no other than a portrait of the beloved child of his old age, Gian-Andrea, <sup>3</sup> for they

<sup>1</sup> Of these *Judiths* by Mantegna's disciples, among the best are those belonging to Lord Pembroke (supposed by Crowe and Cavalcaselle to be a Flemish copy of the sixteenth century), to Mr Taylor, and the drawings of the Louvre and the British Museum.

<sup>2</sup> Anon., p. 179.

<sup>3</sup> See page 36. The child is first mentioned in the will of 1504.





*Alinari photo*]

[*Garrara Gallery, Bergamo*

THE MADONNA AND CHILD



bear evidence of being painted for his own pleasure, by a man in constant and intimate relation with his model.

Nothing more full of sympathy for child-life can well be conceived, than the sleeping infant of the Poldi-Pezzoli Gallery (Plate 28); nor more tender than the wistful mother, bending her head over its round cheeks. No longer hieratic, as in the previous group, both have abdicated their right to divinity, and become simply human; but the charm is not less than in the radiant and stately altar-pieces of the past. Of the same date, and obviously a study from the same mother, as she sat on a low stool at his feet, bending over her child, is the engraving (Bartsch, 8), which we shall presently consider.

Equally true to Nature is the sleeping child in Herr Simon's collection, lapped in the brocade folds of its mother's mantle, as in a cradle. She bends her grave face over him, one hand supporting his head, pressing her cheek upon it, the other round his swathed body. It is the same child, and the face of the Virgin we have seen once before, as she kneels with bent head at the feet of the Christ-child in the *Hortus Inclusus*. This painting is one of the most sympathetic and technically perfect of Mantegna's later style, with its exquisite tenderness of feeling, and the marvellous truth with which the unconscious sleep of infancy is rendered.

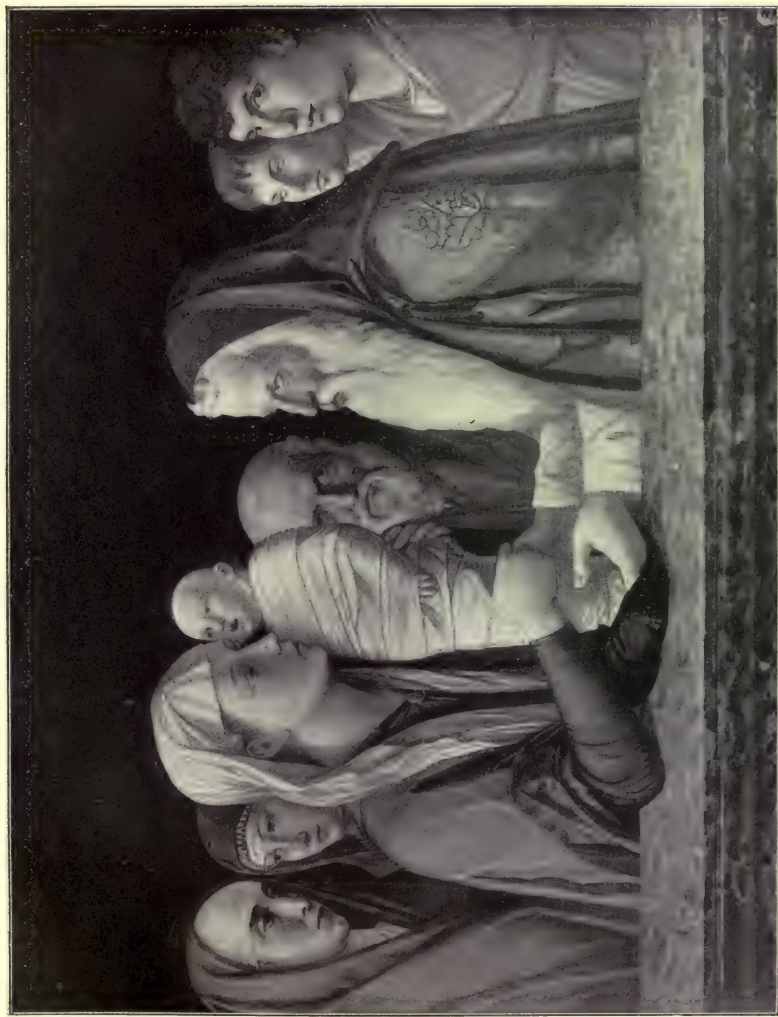
Lastly, in the Bergamo canvas (Plate 29) we see again the same child, but this time no longer placidly sleeping. He is painted under the stress of some childish malady, with puckered face, as though about to cry. It is a study of the same date as Herr Simon's, a little later than the

Poldi-Pezzoli painting. The face is the same, only a little fine hair has grown on the round head, and two tiny teeth have pushed their way through.

Perhaps about this time, or even a little earlier, may be placed the panel of *The Presentation*, in the Querini-Stampalia Collection, Venice. (Plate 30.) This is undoubtedly a finer and more important painting than that of the same subject in Berlin, No. 29 (Plate 31), as its great superiority of composition alone evidences. Here we have one of Mantegna's most characteristic works, with the classic influence strongly accentuated. What, for instance, are the two youth's heads, one with his draperies arranged bust-fashion across the shoulders, but busts of grave Romans, and the sculpturally-mantled S. Elizabeth but some Roman matron? Morelli considered the Berlin canvas to be merely a copy, arguing that so blameless a draughtsman as Mantegna could never have drawn thus weakly.<sup>1</sup> But the picture ruined as it is by repaint, yet retains the gravity, the concentration of force, which are the never-failing tests of Mantegna's own work. The most important figures are entirely repainted, while in details which have escaped, owing to their comparative unimportance (the hands and arms of the Virgin and High Priest, the hair of Joseph and the small bit of his ear which is visible, the head-drapery of the Virgin—parts in which no mere copier would be at his best), we find work which has all the characteristics of Mantegna's own hand. What, however, we may criticise, and find greatly inferior to the Venice panel, is the sacrifice of the noble

<sup>1</sup> Morelli, "Die Galerie zu Berlin," p. 98.





*Alinari photo*

PLATE 30

THE PRESENTATION

[Querini Stampalia Gallery, Venice]





*Hanfstaeuyl photo*

THE PRESENTATION IN THE TEMPLE

[Berlin Gallery]

PLATE 31





composition, partly by the omission of the two grand heads, the lack of which not only destroys its dignity, but makes the gaze of the remaining female meaningless, and the loss of the sense of space, by the addition of the frame in which they are set, which so unpleasantly crowds the composition, the figures seeming packed inside a narrow window, instead of, as in the panel, standing solemnly before the marble slab of the altar. I am tempted to think that it must have been altered and tampered with at some early date, by a "restorer," for it is hardly conceivable that the composer of the splendidly-grouped Venice panel should himself have deliberately sacrificed, not only the two noblest of the figures, but thereby the classic simplicity and dignity of the composition, and imprisoned and crowded the rest within a perfectly meaningless framework.<sup>1</sup>

The Venice painting was seen by the Anonymo in the house of Pietro Bembo, in Padua, and is described by him as a circumcision.<sup>2</sup> It is in an equally ruined condition, as far as ignorant repainting is concerned, with the Berlin canvas.

Probably to the same period belongs Lady Ashburton's fine *Adoration of the Magi*, a good example of the breadth and freedom of Mantegna's later style. Of special excellence is the fine modelling of the head of the old king. The picture is thinly

<sup>1</sup> The other painting in the Berlin Gallery attributed to Mantegna, the *Madonna*, No. 27, I agree with Morelli in thinking a work of Bartolommeo Vivarini, by whom also is the much superior painting—the *Madonna*, belonging to Mr Charles Butler.

<sup>2</sup> Anon. Mor., p. 44.

painted in somewhat bright colours, and the canvas has been torn across and repainted in some of the most important parts, but, notwithstanding its injuries, it retains its solemn and tender beauty.

The same mixture of stateliness and sympathetic charm is noticeable in that most brilliant of all Mantegna's easel pictures, *The Madonna of Victory*, of the Louvre, painted at the age of sixty-five. (Plate 32.) Here he has touched the height of all he had striven to attain in composition, in form, in portraiture, and in technical excellence. What painter has ever more magnificently celebrated his patron or conceived for him a grander apotheosis? It is a wonderful portrait, for we know from the bust<sup>1</sup> and medals of Melioli and Sperandio how easily this strange face could be interpreted into a mere ferocious mask. Mantegna, reading deep into the souls of men, has, while rendering the features with absolute fidelity, dignified them by the poetry and nobility of the expression, fully justified by what we know of this prince's character. And in what an exquisite bower he has placed the Virgin! An apse of dark green foliage, in which great golden fruits gleam out like lamps, and birds sit and sing against the sky. She lays a protecting hand over the head of the kneeling prince, and the child upon her knee likewise blesses him. On either side SS. Michael and George uphold her mantle—grand figures, distinguished by their stature as the patrons of battle and victory. Behind appear the heads of the special protectors of Mantua, SS. Andrew and Longinus;

<sup>1</sup> This fine terra-cotta bust of the Marquis Francesco, by Sperandio or Cavalli, is in the Museo, Mantua.



*Neurdein photo*]

[*Lowre, Paris*

THE MADONNA OF VICTORY





and before the throne, gazing wistfully up at the Child, the Marchioness' patron-saint, Elizabeth. In her beautiful and pathetic face we recognise a portrait of the Beata Osanna, a kinswoman of the Gonzagas, and of much reputation at this time for her sanctity and miraculous power.<sup>1</sup> The great canvas glows with splendid colour; the arrangement of the figures, accurately balanced, yet agreeably varied, gives to the composition that architectonic quality which is of so incalculable a value in painting; while the life-sized figures take their place well within the enclosed space of the apse, whose deep recess seems actually to open inwards from the sides of the frame.

Immediately after its completion Mantegna must have begun the altar-piece for the monks of Santa Maria degli Organi, in Verona, *The Assumption of the Virgin*, now in the collection of Prince Trivulzio, Milan.<sup>2</sup> The account-books of the Monastery record, already in 1496, payments for gold, ultramarine, and gifts of food to Mantegna, and the painting is signed and dated August 15, 1497. In the absence of detail and simplicity of surroundings, this canvas contrasts well with the gorgeous *Madonna of Victory*; the one painted for the worldly prince, the other for the studious monks—more austere, but hardly less grand. On either side stand life-sized saints against great bushes of citrons and oranges, leading the eye inwards, after his favourite manner, to where the Virgin is seated enthroned, surrounded by cherubs. Right, is

<sup>1</sup> Compare the portrait of the Beata Osanna, by Bonsignori, in the Museo of Mantua.

<sup>2</sup> Mentioned by Vasari, iii, 393.



S. Jerome, his robe swept about him in folds almost Venetian in their breadth; left, S. John the Baptist, lean and austere, little changed since the early S. Zeno altarpiece; and behind, S. Romualdo and Pope Gregory, the latter with a face of great dignity and beauty. But perhaps the most attractive part of the painting is the group of angels at their feet, singing to a little organ, with the inspired rapture of Melozzo in their fervent eyes.

At no distant date must be placed our own canvas of the National Gallery, representing the Virgin between S. John the Baptist and the Magdalen. (Plate 33.) Here, as in so many of his later works, Mantegna has chosen to depict her, not majestic, but humble and tender; whereas in the Child he has reverted to the hieratic type. The contrast is most marked between this simple Virgin, bearing her honours so meekly, and the majestic bearing of the saints who guard her; the Baptist, austere and melancholy, and the Magdalen with her luminous, inspired gaze. The painting is in a state of perfect preservation. The colour-scheme is light in tone, bright, and rather too varied, perhaps, in the juxtaposition of yellow, blues and reds. Even at this late date, Mantegna, in his signature, still proclaims himself citizen of Padua.

With the new century Mantegna enters on a new phase of development. It is characteristic of his energetic nature that he never allows his ideas or his expression of them to become stereotyped; that he was to the last sensitive to new conditions, receptive of modern impressions; leading the way towards a less restricted epoch of art. In the *Parnassus* and *The*



*Hanfstaengl photo]*

*[National Gallery, London*

THE MADONNA AND CHILD WITH SAINTS



*Triumph of Wisdom*, of the Louvre, he is already the Cinquecentist; more spontaneous, in touch with Nature, flooding his scenes with light and atmosphere—the precursor, one might almost say, of Poussin and Watteau. This power of adaptation to his environment, and of continual development, is more extraordinary when we consider that he was now seventy years of age, and already feeling the approach of physical decline. Yet these paintings, the *Parnassus* especially, are conceived with all the brightness of youth, in unaffected enjoyment of beautiful forms and scenery, of rhythmic movement and grace. The God of War and the Goddess of Beauty have seldom been more nobly portrayed than in these triumphant figures, who stand high upon Parnassus, rulers of the sacred mount. Below them, to the music of Apollo, the Muses dance in stately measure—all but one, who has bounded in with swifter movement, thereby indicating perhaps, Terpsichore herself.<sup>1</sup> In the foreground stands Mercury, lord of eloquence, leaning on Pegasus—a fantastic beast, mild and beautiful, wings spreading from his sides, his neck hung with great glowing jewels.<sup>2</sup> Behind rises the Pierian hill, source of the sacred stream, which, flowing under the rocks, emerges at our feet.

Its companion piece is almost of equal beauty. (Plate 34.) Minerva, assisted by Diana, goddess of

<sup>1</sup> The Munich Gallery possesses the original study for the centre figure, pricked for transfer. There is also an engraving by Zoan Andrea of four of them, slightly varied in gesture, evidently from a drawing by Mantegna himself.

<sup>2</sup> In the Paris Sketch-book of J. Bellini, in "The Preaching of S. John Baptist," is a horse very like this, in attitude and in the gentle expression.



chastity, and Philosophy, with the torch of reason, storms through a classic cypress-grove, and drives from its sheltering depths the herd of Vices, headed by Ignorance their king, bloated and inert, borne in the arms of Avarice and Ingratitude. The Vices are represented in the true Renaissance conception of their relative degree: the most loathsome, after Ignorance, being Sloth, hideously maimed, Idleness, and Malice in the form of a misshapen ape; while Fury, as a centaur, and the sensual vices as a graceful woman and a comely female satyr, are dealt with very leniently. The latter clasps a whole brood of goat-legged babies in her arms, and behind and around her, out of the dark arches of cypress flits a cloud of *amorini* and owl-faced creatures, stirred, bat-like, from the gloom. Nowhere has Mantegna rendered the beauty of Nature with greater charm than in the delicate water-plants of the pool; nor composed more beautiful surroundings than this garden, with its arches of dark foliage, and the distant meadows and hills, with the almost Giorgionesque feeling for the luscious green of well-watered vegetation.

These pictures were painted, as we have seen, for the study of Isabella d'Este. We know by the numerous letters written by her to Perugino and Costa, who painted companion scenes,<sup>1</sup> that she left little freedom either in subject or detail to the artist; and it is probable that she personally superintended and gave directions in the painting of these also. If we may

<sup>1</sup> Perugino painted *The Combat of Love and Chastity*; Costa, the *Mythological Scene* (by some supposed to have been designed by Mantegna himself) and *The Court of Isabella D'Este*. All five are now in the Louvre.





[*Louvre, Paris*]

TRIUMPH OF WISDOM OVER THE VICES

PLATE 34



attribute to the charm of her influence their freshness and grace, we may reasonably hold her responsible for the few defects which are so foreign to Mantegna's own style—the explanatory scrolls, which so mar the beauty of the composition in the latter work, and the obsession of the allegorical intention.

The precise date of their execution is not known, but is certainly within the first years of the new century. In 1501 Isabella was trying to induce Giovanni Bellini to paint one of the set, and in 1505 Perugino alludes to Mantegna's pictures as already completed. The paintings were brought to France by Richelieu after the sack of Mantua, to decorate his own castle.

There are but three more works to consider, those found in the studio at the time of Mantegna's death. These are the *S. Sebastian*, belonging to Baron Franchetti, of Venice, the foreshortened *Christ*, of the Brera, and the *Scipio*, of our own Gallery. The *S. Sebastian*, from the illustrative point of view, is little more than a *replica* of the early Vienna panel. We have nearly the same attitude, the same exaggerated expression, the same over-pierced body. But the treatment is entirely different, broader and more vigorous. The figure is colossal, and stands out massively like sculpture; the pale flesh accentuated against the dim-coloured background. The head touches the top of the canvas, and the feet the bottom. The well-proportioned athletic body is splendidly modelled—a magnificent study of the nude. Nothing, as in the earlier paintings, detracts from the significance of the figure. The only accessories are a string of coral and

crystal balls hanging above, and below an emblematic candle, its just extinguished wick still glowing and smoking, and around it a scroll inscribed: NIL NISI DIVINUM STABILE EST CÆTERA FUMUS. "Nought but the Divine endures, all else is smoke."

The history of the picture is very complete. It was painted for the Marquis' brother, Sigismondo, Bishop of Mantua, but found its way to the house of Cardinal Pietro Bembo, in Padua (where it was seen by the Anonymo<sup>1</sup>), remaining in the possession of his descendants till 1807, when it was bought by Professor Scarpa for his collection at Motta di Livenza. The present owner has placed it in the Chapel of the Ca d' Oro, where it is seen to the utmost advantage in the light for which it was intended, striking full on one side and throwing the rest into shadow.

*The Dead Christ*, of the Brera (Plate 35), is a proof that Mantegna's interest in scientific problems had not decreased with advancing age. Probably one of his latest works, it shows as keen an ardour in grappling with technical difficulties as the early frescoes of the Eremitani. It is a study of astonishing grandeur and realism; the body and limbs, foreshortened into the smallest space, yet give the impression of a man of lofty stature and massive build. The modelling of the feet is especially admirable. In the British Museum is a pen sketch drawn from the same model, in all probability actually a dying man. In that he has raised himself on his arm in the death-agony; here he has sunk back, and the muscles are relaxed in death. As a realistic study of death the picture is beyond

<sup>1</sup> Anon. Mor., p. 50.



[Brera, Milan]

THE DEAD CHRIST

*Alinari photo*]





praise, and though the scientific intention is too obvious to allow much scope for religious appeal, yet this innovation on the traditional treatment of the theme is but one more proof of Mantegna's progressive spirit—his assertion of Art's independence and right to work for her own ends and aims.

Turning from this to the early Ancona opposite—(the Brera is fortunate in possessing the grandest among the earliest and latest works) the mighty scope of Mantegna's genius, and all he has achieved for Art, rises significantly before us. More than half a life-time has elapsed since those statuesque figures, inspired with the noble ideals and aspirations of youth, were conceived. Since then, how many golden keys has not Mantegna given wherewith to open the doors upon the bright sunshine of early 16th century Art, with its radiant warmth, and fearless, untrammelled spirit. If the scientific realism of this great painting has, perhaps, divested it of its appeal as illustrating the divine theme of Christ's death, does it not assume an almost symbolic meaning touching the painter himself, to us who have had the time to weigh the greatness of his gifts—the dead Titan lying there, at the close of a long devoted life, like a shattered column, the Promethean labours ended, the divine fires bestowed upon mankind.

The last existing painting on which he was engaged seems to have been the *Scipio*, of our National Gallery. (Plate 36.) Begun in 1504, for Francesco Cornaro, a Venetian claiming descent from the family of Cornelius Scipio, it was laid aside, owing to disputes about the price, that originally fixed—150 ducats—seeming to Mantegna too small for the importance of the work as it

proceeded; and it was only at the intervention of Cardinal Bembo, and of the Marchioness herself, that he was induced to complete it in the last months of his life. The painting is on canvas, and, with the exception of the reddish marble background, is in chiaroscuro, imitating marble carved in high relief. Its subject is that triumph of Scipio Nasica, when, chosen as the worthiest of the Roman Senators, he goes to receive the sacred bust of Cybele. He stands surrounded by his fellows, their robust figures splendidly modelled under the well arranged draperies. Each has the individual character of a portrait. Note especially the figure to the right of Scipio, whose rough-hewn features, plump figure, and ungainly bearing, reveal his simple and whimsical character. There is much vivid action in the figures, especially in that of Claudia Quinta, who has thrown herself on her knees, stretching out her hands towards the image. After the death of Mantegna, this picture, together with those just mentioned, was claimed by the Bishop of Mantua, as payment for the chapel in S. Andrea, but it seems to have found its way to its rightful owner, Francesco Cornaro, in the possession of whose descendants it remained till the beginning of the present century, when it was sold and brought to England.

We have now glanced, in the approximate order of their execution, at all the surviving paintings by Mantegna, and traced the steady evolution of his work from the statuesque severity of his earlier to the freer realism of his later years; and following the steady widening of his horizon, recognising his grip on the life of his own time, his power of welding his classic



[*Hanfstaengl photo*]

[*National Gallery, London*]

SCIPIO

PLATE 36





ideals with the actual life around him, we find in him an artist not second to Donatello himself in the many-sidedness of his genius. Like Donatello also in his great influence upon his time: his powerful intellect and the energy of his nature, his earnestness and steadfast adherence to his ideals, forced those ideals upon his generation, and few painters have left stronger or more beneficial effects upon contemporary art. There is no space here to touch even upon the greatest of those who submitted to his influence. It worked profoundly, not only in Italy, but, by the channel of Albrecht Dürer, throughout Germany also. All that is noblest and strongest in the Paduan School is due to its greatest son, Mantegna, who not only succeeded in realising its aims, but shot far beyond its loftiest aspirations. As great and individual a painter as Cosimo Tura was inspired by him. Bonsignori, Montagna and Caroto never showed themselves so grandly as when under his spell, and of his immediate pupils we have work which lacks little of the master's own dignity and beauty. Such are the *grisaille* paintings, in all probability by his son Lodovico, the so-called *Seasons*, of the National Gallery, the *Judith* and the *Dido*, belonging to Mr Taylor, the classic figures and the Evangelists of the Chapel of S. Andrea, together with *The Baptism* and *The Holy Family* hanging on its walls.<sup>1</sup> Even a painter so temperamentally trivial as Francesco (if, indeed, he be the artist of the three panels—*The Resurrection*, etc., of the

<sup>1</sup> It is possible that the design of these latter may have been Mantegna's own, but the painting is certainly not his.

National Gallery<sup>1</sup>) obtains by the imitation of external forms a certain nobility, which is at the first glance impressive. But the pure and classic distinction of the master's own work not one of all his followers acquired, and it is this quality—a quality unfortunately not susceptible of demonstration—which, once recognised, makes his genuine work so unmistakable. Closely as his style of execution, his forms, even the plastic solidity of his modelling, are imitated, this peculiar grace, the emanation of his own personality—not to be imparted—is lacking to his imitators.

<sup>1</sup> *Noli me tangere*, No. 639, *The Resurrection*, No. 1106, and *The Holy Women at the Sepulchre*, No. 1381

## CHAPTER VII

### DRAWINGS AND ENGRAVINGS

IT is perhaps a truism to say that the drawings of a great artist are the means of truer comprehension, a source of purer enjoyment, than his more elaborate work. They are always in the nature of personal notes, directly self-expressive and spontaneous; and in the case of Mantegna their value is enhanced, because many of his paintings have suffered so terribly from ruin and repaint. Also, in accordance with his characteristic thoroughness, he has bestowed on them a delicacy and beauty of finish, which raises them above the rank of mere studies, each being a complete picture in itself. Although many inferior drawings have been attributed to him in bygone days, yet the characteristics of his own style are so marked, the grandeur of form, the broad massing of the shadows and the plastic modelling so matchless, that it is not an impossible task to separate his own from the mass of imitative work.

Putting aside the three *grisaille* paintings already considered—the *Scævola*, the *Judgment of Solomon*, and the *Judith* of Dublin—we have but twelve drawings left, each, however, worthy of a separate analysis. Only two may be placed in the early days, most of them dating after the Roman visit. The first—*The Madonna and Angel*—of the British Museum, may be dated

approximately soon after the painting of the Verona altar-piece. The Virgin is of his noblest type. She sits, grave and very upright, her beautiful hands clasping the child on her knee. Below the *gradino* of her throne a child-angel is seated, a lute across its knees, its mouth open in song; a charming little figure, contemporary certainly with the small acolyte of the Uffizi *Circumcision*. The drawing is in ink on brownish paper. As is usual in Mantegna's pen work, the line is subordinated to the massing of the lights and shadows.

Next in order comes the so-called *Resurrection* of the Munich collection, dating certainly from the early Mantuan days. The composition is stately and severe. Christ, holding the banner, stands before the tomb; S. Longinus, a bald, thickset soldier in Roman armour, on his right; S. Andrew, in a superb attitude, half leaning against, half supporting, his cross, on his right. These saints are, it will be remembered, the special patrons of Mantua. Below is inscribed *PIO ET IMMORTALI DEO*. It is in pen, washed with sepia, and is the drawing for the engraving, with which it is identical in size. The ink is very faded, and the head of Christ has been cut out, and replaced by another, coarser in stroke, and probably copied from the engraving by a later hand.

In the collection of the Duke of Devonshire, at Chatsworth, is a magnificent specimen of Mantegna's pen work—one-half of *The Battle of Marine Gods*, drawn likewise for the engraving, which we shall consider presently. In it we find an even greater energy than in the engraving, a crispness and spontaneity, not





*Ainari photo*]

[*Uffizi, Florence*

JUDITH





permitted by the more deliberate process of the burin. Note especially the far greater fire and *élan* in horse and rider on the right, and the more concentrated ferocity in the expression of the hag Invidia. We come next to the *Judith* of the Uffizi (Plate 37), a delicately finished water-colour painting, and which, for noble form, fine modelling and beauty of line, as well as for the poetic conception of the character, seems to me one of Mantegna's grandest works. It dates from the year after the return from Rome, 1491—inscribed by himself in antique fashion below his name: ANDREAS MANTINIA MCCCCCLXXXI FEBI. It was formerly in the collection of Vasari, who seemed fully to appreciate its beauty, although he expresses himself in his usual stereotyped phraseology.<sup>1</sup> The photograph, unfortunately, being sensitive to the stains in the paper, gives no idea of the delicacy of the line, the subtle suggestions of shadow, by which the modelling of the limbs is gained, the crisp life in the tightly-curved hair, and the twisted fillet which falls from it. The beauty of the strong, yet daintily-built limbs, is seen beneath the drapery, classic and pure. In the inexorable face, with its look of still horror, we read the whole tragic story—the inevitable acceptance of the mission, the profound loathing of the deed. Note the expressive action of the hand, shrinking from contact with its ghastly burden, as it lowers the head into the sack, delicately, between finger and thumb. The slave looks up with reverence and love at the stern beauty of the face above her. Mantegna has never shown himself greater

<sup>1</sup> Vasari, iii., 402

draughtsman or greater poet, than in this drawing—worthy illustration of the grand old Hebrew poem.

We have the same figure repeated, this time in the nude, in another drawing of this same date, when he was deeply impressed by Roman sculpture—the *Mars between Venus and Diana*, of the British Museum. His interest is here concentrated in the two female figures, and we may complain of the Mars that the attitude is poor, and the extremities too weak for the colossal head and torso. But only in the *Judith* do we find the equal in classic beauty of the two goddesses. It will be noticed that the attitude of both is, with the exception of the head, nearly identical with hers, and in fact, we have the same model in all three figures, the same broad-shouldered athletic woman, firm-fleshed, straight-limbed, and strong.

This large drawing was originally in sepia wash, heightened with white, but has been touched in by some later hand with crude colours—Mars with heavy crimson and Venus with ultramarine. But unpleasant though this may be, it has not spoilt the superb modelling and lines, and does not seriously interfere with our enjoyment of its beauty.

In the same collection is the curious drawing called *Virtus combusti*, dating probably from the time of the Louvre Allegories, with which it has much in common. It was in two parts, but the lower half no longer exists, and is known to us only through the engraving of Zoan Andrea, who copied both.<sup>1</sup> In the remaining drawing Ignorance, fat and hideous, sits enthroned on a globe supported by sphynxes; Envy, a ferocious, bat-eared

<sup>1</sup> Bartsch, 16.

hag on one side, and Prejudice, blindfold, on the other. Below is a hole filled with coins, near which lie money sacks, and at the side burning boughs of laurel, beneath which is inscribed VIRTUS COMBUSTI. To the left, a nude female, blindfold, and guided by three strange figures, is about to precipitate herself over a wall. The scene is gloomy and strange. It is heavily coloured in sepia and crimson, heightened with white, against a deep black background. The lower half, which joins it, and which is engraved by Zoan Andrea, shows the remaining part of the wall, and a heap of bodies at its base—people who have precipitated themselves at the command of Ignorance, as the woman above is about to do. They lie in a passage before a heavily-bolted door, dead, all but one, whom Mercury helps to rise. Near, Daphne, half a tree as in the Louvre Allegory, bears a tablet inscribed VIRTUS DESERTA.

Of about the same date is the pen and ink *Calumny of Apelles*, also in the British Museum; differing little from the usual rendering of the Allegory.

The Munich Gallery possesses a large drawing of a dancing Muse—a study for the central figure in the *Parnassus*, of the same size, and pricked for transferring. It is in sepia, on brown paper, heightened with white.

In the splendid collection of drawings belonging to Herr von Beckerath, of Berlin, is another study for one of these dancing figures, that of the Muse, who has hurled herself into the dance with greater *élan* than the rest. It is in pen and sepia wash heightened with white, and the original drawing, a fragment only, has been unfortunately restored, the right hand, and both legs from the shin downwards, being modern. The

beauty of line, the fine action and characteristic treatment of drapery leave no doubt in my mind of its being by Mantegna.

Lastly, in the British Museum, so rich in Mantegna's drawings, is the study of the dying man, already referred to, who served as the model for the *Dead Christ* of the Brera ; and which, therefore, must be placed towards the close of his life ; a very realistic sketch of a robust man suddenly struck down, who makes a vain effort to raise his once powerful frame from the slab on which he has been laid, and where, the death-struggle over, he will presently sink down, as we see him in the Brera canvas. The drawing is in ink, firmly and rapidly drawn with a broad pen.

With this closes the list of Mantegna's genuine drawings. Of the large number attributed to him, the best are probably by his son Lodovico, some—the figure of Virgil in the Louvre for example—by Bon-signori, but they are so numerous that it is impossible here to notice even the most important. Some have a very high value of their own, for to follow the lead of so fine a draughtsman was a splendid education ; but a study of these twelve drawings will reveal the gulf separating the master's own work from that of the closest of his followers.

It is difficult to compress into the small remaining space consideration of work so powerful as the engravings of Mantegna, for the best are of a grandeur and beauty of design, a directness and effectiveness of execution, which rank him with Dürer as a master of the burin. Great difference of opinion exists as to the exact date at which he first began to engrave.



Formerly he was reputed to be the first Italian engraver, but it is now known with certainty that the first plate—the celebrated *Pace* of Tommaso Finiguerra—was engraved in 1452, while the earliest period of Mantegna's engraving would not be till after that date. Many suppose that his interest in the process was first aroused during the Florentine visit of 1466, spurred on, perhaps, by Antonio Pollaiuolo; but the evidence of the work itself points to a much earlier date. The resemblance between his earliest plates—*The Flagellation* and *Christ in Limbo*—and the first Eremitani frescoes leads to the conclusion that they belong to the same date. The *serré* and restricted treatment of form, the crumpled casting of the draperies, belong essentially to the Paduan days; and we may, with a fair amount of certainty, assume that, shortly after the so-called invention by Finiguerra, Mantegna himself made experiments in the new process. As we shall see, the engravings go side by side with the paintings; allied with them not only in subject, but in treatment following the same course of development. From the twenty-three plates ascribed to him by Bartsch, we select only ten, as being not only designed by him but engraved by his own hand; the selection being, as with the drawings, rendered comparatively easy by reason of their great superiority to the work of his numerous imitators. The following list seems in the correct order of execution.

*The Flagellation.* B. 1. (unfinished)

*Christ in Limbo.* B. 5.

*The Virgin of the Cave.* B. 9. (unfinished).

*The Entombment.* (long-shaped) B. 3.

*The Resurrection.* B. 6.

*Silenus.* B. 20.

*Bacchanal with the Vat.* B. 19.

{ *Combat of Tritons.* B. 17.

{ *Combat of Marine Gods.* B. 18.

*Madonna and Child.* B. 8.

The earliest of these, *The Flagellation* and *The Limbo*, are allied in every respect with the first frescoes of the Eremitani. Here are the same types, the same severely drawn forms, the same arrangement of draperies. We feel in them the craftsman not yet sure of his tools, of their special character and value. The shadows are confused, and there is little emphasis of significant points. That Mantegna himself was dissatisfied with the plate of *The Flagellation* is suggested by the unfinished state of the top and the left corner.

Another early plate is the very rare *Madonna of the Cave*, also unfinished, copied from the tryptych of the Uffizi, and probably contemporary with it in date. Its technique likewise bears evidence of no very great experience in the craft. Mantegna has extracted the figure of the Virgin, seated in the cave's mouth, with the Child on her knee, and indicated with a few lines the kneeling king and Joseph. As in the foregoing, the mass of lines in the shadows is confused, and broken up by reflected lights. It is possible that his dissatisfaction with his work caused him to abandon the plate, and certainly it lacks much of the noble beauty of the painted figure, as well as the solidity and firm modelling. But this is the last of the tentative work.



*From an engraving]*

COMBAT OF MARINE GODS—PLATE I.

PLATE 38





In the next, the long-shaped *Entombment*,<sup>1</sup> he has completely mastered the technique, and produced a plate which for emphasis of line and effective treatment is second to none. The severe style, the type of figure and the casting of the draperies, point to its being, however, little later than the foregoing. The composition is grand. The statuesque figure of S. John, firmly planted as a rock, with lips wide apart in the agony of sorrow, the earnest solicitude of the women who tend the lifeless Virgin, the noble gesture of Joseph of Arimathea, who, bearing the feet of Christ, turns to gaze pityingly down on the group, reveal a keen sympathy with his theme. The lines are fine and firm, and very delicate in the outline, while the values of distance are extremely well rendered.<sup>2</sup>

Also from the early Mantuan days must date the so-called *Resurrection*, representing Christ between SS. Andrew and Longinus, the patron saints of Mantua. In this fine engraving we observe an increased delicacy and firmness of line, and a greater attention to single effective strokes and sharp accentuation. It is an exact copy of the drawing already considered.

Several years elapse before the next group, which must be placed shortly after the return from Rome in 1490—the *Silenus*, *The Bacchanal with the Vat*, and the double plate of *The Combat of Marine Gods*. We

<sup>1</sup> There is a good pen copy, probably contemporary, in the library of Christ Church, Oxford. Also several copies on copper (as of nearly all his plates), one of them by Zoan Andrea.

<sup>2</sup> The upright *Entombment*, B. 2., is undoubtedly the work of Francesco Mantegna, as a comparison with the panels of *The Resurrection*, etc., in the National Gallery will show. To him also I should ascribe *The Descent from the Cross*, B. 4.



are helped to fix their date by the fact that two of them, the *Silenus* and the first half of *The Combat*, were copied by Dürer in 1494.<sup>1</sup> In the spirit and technical qualities of the engravings, we observe a steady increase of freedom corresponding to the development already noticed in the paintings, so that even without documentary help they fall into their place alongside of these. They show the impression made upon Mantegna by the classic and pagan spirit of Rome. Of the four the *Silenus* is perhaps the earliest. Somewhat coarser in line than the others, it is treated in the same genial mood, and with a touch of broad humour, foreign to Mantegna, in the expression of the over-burdened bearers of the unwieldy *Silenus* and his huge female votary. The fine balance of the composition and the rhythmic movements of its lines are in the true spirit of antique bas-relief.

More beautiful in its decorative qualities, as well as in the excellence of the graving, is *The Bacchanal with the Vat*. The half-dancing form to the right is one of his most delightful conceptions, with the growth of acanthus leaves curling exquisitely over his limbs. We can almost hear the jingle of the bells, as he raises one foot rhythmically from the flood of wine. Every inch of his supple body is alert with buoyant life, the life of bird and squirrel and all agile wood-creatures. It is the dancing faun of antique sculpture, with added vivacity and grace.

We have now to consider the magnificent plates of the *Combats of Tritons and of Marine Gods*, which, notwithstanding that Bartsch has given them different

<sup>1</sup> In the Albertina Collection, Vienna.



*From an engraving]*

COMBAT OF MARINE GODS—PLATE II.

PLATE 39



titles, form in reality one single picture, and should be taken as one, in order to appreciate the beauty and balance of the composition. Mantegna has given with unsurpassed vigour the wild battle of the fantastic sea-creatures.

In the first plate (Plate 38) two of these, mounted on fierce sea-horses wage savage warfare with huge bones and bunches of fish, urged thereto by the ferocious hag Invidia, who stands on the back of a crocodile. In the background, in a bed of bulrushes is a statue of Neptune with his trident. A special interest is attached to this plate since the discovery by M. François Lenormant of the fragment of ancient bas-relief from which Mantegna copied the principal figures. In the church of S. Vitale, in Ravenna, is the sculpture, probably taken from a former temple of Neptune, now built into the wall of the arch, beneath which was at one time the sarcophagus of the Exarch Isaac. A glance at the fragment suffices to put beyond doubt that Mantegna must have seen and copied it. Here we have the same figures mounted on their dragon-tailed fiery steeds, one swinging the bunch of fishes, the other grasping the bone-weapon. These Mantegna has exactly reproduced to the minutest detail, but has added the background and the additional figures.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See Delaborde's "Gravure en Italie," Appendix, p. 269, where an illustration of the fragment is given. It seems that Mr Palgrave, in his translation of Kugler, had, as early as 1855, noticed the fact of the existence of the sculpture, but in the vaguest terms, merely stating that in Ravenna was a bas-relief which had served as a model to Mantegna for his *Combat of Marine Gods*. Rubbiani ("Arch. Stor.," 1895. p. 229) draws attention to a much damaged terra-cotta frieze on a house in Bologna (No.



The other plate (Plate 39) shows two Tritons fighting savagely, each with a female seated on his tail. One (whose tail and drapery belong to the first plate) defends himself with a huge skull from the sharp-boned weapon of his adversary. In the background a youth blows a blast from his horn, while another male figure tries to buffet him with a bunch of fishes.

The plate is decorative to the highest degree, with its background of rushes, the great curves of the monster's tails, the sharp lines of the fins, and the rhythmic undulation of the waves. The action is full of life and energy, and, had we not seen the drawing, it would seem impossible to be more spontaneous. Mantegna has now acquired absolute mastery of the burin. He can allow himself a loose rein, and uses the graver with as certain a power, as free a sweep, as though it were pen or brush. Note how emphatically the shadows are accentuated. With a few firm lines he strikes the light full on the plastically moulded bodies, bringing the firm muscles into salient relief, and dismissing to its due distance the background of rushes. This engraving shows Mantegna at the height of his artistic power, and fitly accompanies his painted work of the same period.

But one more work remains to be considered: the most beautiful and sympathetic *Madonna* (Plate 40), which dates from the same time as the Poldi-Pezzoli, and Bergamo and Simon paintings, that is to say from

123 Borgo S. Pietro), in which the Ravenna bas-relief is several times reproduced, and which he claims to be of the fifteenth century. The terracotta (of which he gives an illustration) is not, as he says, a copy of Mantegna's engraving, but of the Ravenna fragment.





*From an engraving]*

MADONNA AND CHILD

PLATE 40



the last years of the century, and which repeats the same figure as the former—the sorrowful mother, seated on a low stool, bending her cheek bodingly over her child.<sup>1</sup>

In his curiously misjudging criticism of Mantegna, the Marchese Selvatico has compared his work to a piece of learned music which can never cause a thrill of emotion.<sup>2</sup> Let this engraving answer so warped a judgment. Austere in his disregard of all that might appeal to the senses, with an idea of humanity strong and temperate, Mantegna is at all times tender and gentle, as we have seen, in dealing with its weaker sides. Life to him was intensely serious, full of high aspirations, and infinite in its possibilities, and he embodied his ideals in types of stately beauty, for whose equal we must turn to the grandest period of Greek sculpture.

Let us close with the words of a contemporary appreciator. Lorenzo da Pavia, maker of musical instruments in Venice, student of art and friend of Leonardo, Perugino and Giovanni Bellini, wrote to Isabella d' Este after his death: "What pain and grief we suffer at the loss of our Messer Andrea Mantegna, who was in truth a man who excelled in everything. It is another Apelles we have just lost. I have faith that the Lord God will employ him to do for Him some beautiful work, but for me, I never hope to see again a draughtsman or designer of so much beauty."

<sup>1</sup> It is significant of the domestic origin of this engraving that in the first impressions there are no haloes.

<sup>2</sup> Vasari, iii., 459.



CATALOGUE OF THE WORKS OF  
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ARRANGED ACCORDING TO THE GALLERIES  
IN WHICH THEY ARE  
CONTAINED





# CATALOGUE OF WORKS

## *AUSTRIA.*

### VIENNA GALLERY.

S. SEBASTIAN. On wood.<sup>1</sup> [No. 282.] [PLATE 15.]

From the Collection of Archduke Leopold Wilhelm.

Inscribed : TO . EPTON . TOY . ANΔPEOY.

## *BRITISH ISLES.*

### DUBLIN GALLERY.

JUDITH. On canvas.

Formerly belonging to Colonel Malcolm.

### HAMPTON COURT.

THE TRIUMPH OF JULIUS CÆSAR. On canvas, in nine sections, each a little over 4 metres square.

I. Procession of the Standard Bearers.

II. Procession of the Gods.

III. Procession of the Trophies of Arms. [PLATE 26.]

IV. Procession of the Treasures.

V. Procession of the Elephants.

VI. Procession of the Royal Arms and Treasure.

VII. Procession of the Prisoners. [PLATE 27.]

VIII. Procession of Musicians.

IX. Julius Cæsar.

Placed in the Palace of S. Sebastiano, Mantua. Bought by Charles I., through his agent, Daniel Nys, in 1629,

<sup>1</sup> The medium used by Mantegna on panel and canvas was invariably tempera, afterwards more or less glazed with varnish. I have, therefore, only indicated the material on which he painted, or when frescoes.

and placed in Hampton Court. Entirely repainted during the reign of William III., by Louis Laguerre.

# LONDON, NATIONAL GALLERY.

MADONNA WITH S. JOHN BAPTIST AND THE MAGDALEN.  
On canvas, 4 ft. 6 in. × 3 ft. 9 in. [No. 274.]

[PLATE 33.]

Formerly in the private chapel of Cardinal Cesare Monti, Archbishop of Milan. At the extinction of the family, in the 18th century, became the property of the Andreani family; then of the Mellerio and Somaglia families. From the latter it was bought by Signor Baslini, then by Signor Roverselli, by whom, in 1855, it was sold to the National Gallery.

Inscribed, "ANDREAS MANTINIA . C . P . F."

THE TRIUMPH OF SCIPIO. On canvas, 2 ft. 4 in. × 8 ft. 10 in. [No. 902.] [PLATE 36.]

Painted for Francesco Cornaro, of Venice. Found at Mantegna's death in his studio, and apparently sent to the Cornaro Palace, at S. Polo, where it remained till the early part of this century. Bought by George Vivian, Esq., and sold by his son, Captain Ralph Vivian, in 1873, to the National Gallery.

GETHSEMANE. On wood, 2 ft. × 2 ft. 7 in. [No. 1417.] Probably painted, in 1459, for Giacomo Marcello, Podestà of Padua. Formerly in Cardinal Fesch's collection, then in that of Mr William Coningham, then of Mr. Thomas Baring, lastly of the Earl of Northbrook, and bought by the National Gallery in 1894.

# LONDON, LADY ASHBURTON, KENT HOUSE, KENSINGTON.

ADORATION OF THE MAGI. On canvas, 1 ft. 7 in. × 2 ft. 2 in.

LONDON, DR. LUDWIG MOND, AVENUE ROAD, N.W.

“HORTUS INCLUSUS.” On canvas, 2 ft. 3 in. × 1 ft. 7 in. [PLATE 24.]

*DENMARK.*

COPENHAGEN, MUSEUM.

CHRIST UPHELD BY ANGELS. On wood. [No. 66.]

Formerly in the collection of Cardinal Valenti, Rome, dispersed in 1764.

Inscribed, “ANDREAS MANTINIA.”

*FRANCE.*

AIGUEPERSE, PUY - DE - DÔME, CHURCH OF NOTRE DAME.

S. SEBASTIAN. On wood.

Probably taken to Aigueperse by Clara Gonzaga, after her marriage in 1481 with Gilbert de Bourbon, Comte de Montpensier.

PARIS, LOUVRE.

CRUCIFIXION. On wood. [No. 1373.]

Part of the altar-piece of S. Zeno, Verona. Painted between 1457-59 for the Protonotary Gregorio Corrarò, Abbot of S. Zeno. The entire altar-piece was taken to Paris by Napoleon in 1797, and this predella-picture retained after the restitution of the chief parts in 1814.

MADONNA OF VICTORY. On canvas. [No. 1374.]

[PLATE 32.]

Finished, 1496. Painted for the votive church of S. Maria della Vittoria, formerly in the Via S. Simone, Mantua, now destroyed. Taken to Paris by Napoleon in 1797.

PARNASSUS. On canvas. [No. 1375.]

Painted for the study of Isabella d'Este, in the Palace of Mantua. After the sack in 1630, taken by Richelieu to his castle. Later in the Musée Napoléon.

THE TRIUMPH OF WISDOM OVERTHE VICES. On canvas, m. 1.60 × 1.92. [No. 1376.] [PLATE 34.]

Companion picture with the foregoing.

THE JUDGMENT OF SOLOMON. On canvas. [No. 241 in the Drawing Department.]

PARIS, COLLECTION OF MADAME ANDRE-JACQUEMART.

MADONNA AND SAINTS. On wood.

ECCE HOMO. On canvas. [Not seen by the author.]

TOURS, MUSEUM.

GETHSEMANE and THE RESURRECTION. On wood.

Parts of the altar-piece of S. Zeno, Verona. [See Note to Crucifixion of the Louvre.]

### GERMANY.

BERLIN, GALLERY

PORTRAIT OF CARDINAL SCARAMPI. On wood. [No. 9.]  
[FRONTISPIECE]

Probably painted in 1459.

PRESENTATION OF CHRIST IN THE TEMPLE. On canvas.  
[No. 29.] [PLATE 31.]

From the Solly Collection. Replica with alterations of the original in the Querini-Stampalia Collection, Venice.

BERLIN, HERR JAMES SIMON.

MADONNA AND CHILD. On canvas.

From the collection of Conte Trissino, Vicenza.



## DRESDEN, GALLERY.

HOLY FAMILY. On canvas. [No. 51.] [PLATE 23.]

Bought in 1876 from the collection of Sir Charles Eastlake.

MUNICH, PINAKOTEK (*Drawing Department*).

MUTIUS SCÆVOLA. On canvas.

Seen by the Anonymo in the house of Francesco Zio, Venice.

## ITALY.

## BERGAMO, GALLERIA CARRARA.

MADONNA AND CHILD. On canvas. [No. 153.]

[PLATE 29.]

## FLORENCE, UFFIZI.

TRYPTYCH: Adoration of the Magi: Resurrection: Circumcision. On wood. [No. 1111.] [PLATES 16 and 17.]

Probably painted about 1460 for the chapel of the Castello Vecchio, Mantua. Found in the possessions of Antonio dei Medici, Prince of Capistrano. Placed in the Gallery of the Medici, 1632.

THE MADONNA OF THE QUARRIES. On wood. [No. 1025.]

[PLATE 22.]

During the life of Vasari in possession of Francesco dei Medici.

## MANTUA, CASTELLO VECCHIO, CAMERA DEGLI SPOSI.

FRESCOES: finished 1474.

L. wall on entering: Reception of an ambassador by Lodovico II. [PLATES 4 and 19.]

R. of entrance: Horses and dogs of Lodovico in landscape.

Over door: *Putti* supporting tablet, with inscription.

L. of entrance : Meeting of Lodovico with Cardinal Francesco. [PLATE 20.]

Ceiling : Centre—Ladies leaning over balustrade with playing *Putti*. [PLATE 21.] Medallions of Cæsars and scenes from the lives of Hercules and Orpheus.

# MILAN, BRERA.

ANCONA : S. Luke with eight Saints and *Pietà*. On wood. [No. 264.] [PLATE 6.]

Finished 1454 for the chapel of S. Luke in the church of Santa Giustina, Padua. Removed to the Abbot's private rooms, and from thence taken by the French in 1797, and sent to Milan.

THE DEAD CHRIST. On canvas. [No. 273.] [PLATE 35.] Found in the studio at death. Painted for Sigismondo Gonzaga, Bishop of Mantua. Appears to have belonged to Charles I., and taken to Rome at the sale of his effects in 1630.<sup>1</sup> Left by the Secretary of the Brera Academy to the Gallery in 1824.

MADONNA AND CHILD WITH CHERUBS. On wood. [No 282.]

From the church of S. Maria Maggiore, Venice, where it was attributed to the school of Giovanni Bellini, an attribution changed after Signor Cavenaghi's cleaning in 1885.

# MILAN, POLDI-PEZZOLI COLLECTION.

MADONNA AND CHILD. On canvas. [PLATE 28.]

# MILAN, PRINCE TRIVULZIO.

MADONNA AND SAINTS, 1497. On canvas.

Painted for the Monks of Santa Maria degli Organi, Verona. Inscribed : ANDREAS MANTINEA PINXIT ANNO GRATIAE, 1497.

<sup>1</sup> The late M. Yriarte is my authority for this statement. See his recently published work on Mantegna. Paris, 1901.

## NAPLES GALLERY.

S. EUFEMIA, 1454. On wood.

Inscribed : OPVS ANDREAE MANTEGNAE  
MCCCCLIII.

PORTRAIT OF THE PROTONOTARY LODOVICO GONZAGA  
(att. to Giovanni Bellini.) On wood.

PADUA, CHURCH OF S. ANTONIO, OVER CHIEF  
ENTRANCE.

SS. ANTONIO AND BERNARDINO SUPPORTING THE SACRED  
INITIALS, 1452. Fresco. [PLATE 5.]

Cut in the stone below : ANDREAS MANTEGNA  
OPTVMO FAVENTE NVMINE PERFECIT.  
MCCCCLII. XI KAL. SEXTII.

PADUA, CHURCH OF THE EREMITANI, OVETARI  
CHAPEL.

FRESCOES : SCENES IN THE LIVES OF SS. JAMES AND  
CHRISTOPHER.

North wall : S. James baptising. [PLATE 7.]

S. James before Cæsar. [PLATE 8.]

S. James led to Martyrdom. [PLATE 9.]

Martyrdom of S. James. [PLATE 10.]

South wall : Martyrdom of S. Christopher. [PL. 11.]

Removal of the body. [PLATE 12.]

## TURIN, GALLERY.

MADONNA AND SAINTS. On wood. [No. 355.]

[PLATE 25.]

## VENICE, ACCADEMIA.

S. GEORGE. On wood. [PLATE 14]

From the Manfrini collection.

## VENICE, QUERINI-STAMPALIA COLLECTION.

PRESENTATION OF CHRIST IN THE TEMPLE. On wood.

[PLATE 30.]

At the beginning of the 16th century in the house of Cardinal Bembo in Padua, and seen there by the Anonymo.

## VENICE, BARON FRANCHETTI CA D'ORO.

S. SEBASTIAN. On canvas, 7 ft.  $\times$  2 ft. 10 in.

Painted for Sigismondo Gonzaga, Bishop of Mantua. Found in studio after Mantegna's death. Seen by the Anonymo in the house of Cardinal Bembo, Padua. In 1807 bought by Professor Scarpa for his collection in Motta di Livenza. Bought by Baron Franchetti, who has placed it in the chapel of the Ca d'Oro.

Inscribed: NIL NISI DIVINUM STABILE EST  
CAETERA FUMUS.

## VERONA, MUSEO.

MADONNA AND SAINTS. On canvas. [No. 87.]

## VERONA, CHURCH OF S. ZENO.

MADONNA ENTHRONED WITH SAINTS. On wood.

[PLATE 13.]

Painted between 1457-59, for the Abbot Gregorio Corrarò.

Taken to Paris by Napoleon in 1797. Returned in 1814. The pictures of the Predella are copies, the originals remaining in France.

*SPAIN.*

## MADRID, PRADO GALLERY.

DEATH OF THE VIRGIN. On wood. [No. 295.]

[PLATE 18.]

Bought by Charles I. in 1627. At the sale of his effects bought by the Spanish Ambassador.

## Catalogue of Mantegna's Drawings

*BRITISH ISLES.*

## CHATSWORTH, DUKE OF DEVONSHIRE'S COLLECTION.

BATTLE OF MARINE GODS. [PLATE 39.]  
Pen.

## LONDON, BRITISH MUSEUM.

MARS BETWEEN VENUS AND DIANA.  
Pen and wash. Coloured by a later hand.

MADONNA AND ANGEL.  
Pen, on brown paper.

DYING MAN.  
Pen.

"VIRTUS COMBUSTI."  
Pen. Heavily coloured in sepia and crimson, heightened white.

CALUMNY OF APELLES.  
Pen.

*FRANCE.*

## DUC D'AUMALE'S COLLECTION.

PROCESSION OF PRISONERS.  
Pen drawing for The Triumph of Cæsar.

*GERMANY.*

## BERLIN, HERR VON BECKERATH.

DANCING MUSE.  
Drawing for the "Parnassus." Pen, heightened white. The lower part of both legs and right hand restored.



## MUNICH, PINAKOTEK.

DANCING MUSE.

Sepia, heightened white. Drawing for the "Parnassus."

CHRIST BETWEEN SS. ANDREW AND LONGINUS.

Pen and wash. Drawing for the engraving.

*ITALY.*

## FLORENCE, UFFIZI.

JUDITH, 1491. [No. 404, Cornice 295.]

[PLATE 37.]

Sepia on white paper. Signed and dated.

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